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DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

“Memnon conçut un jour le projet insensé d’être parfaitement sage. Il n’y a guère d’hommes à qui cette folie n’ait quelquefois passé par la tête.”—VOLTAIRE.

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PERSONS REPRESENTED.

HARRY TELFER (Dolly's husband).

MATTHEW BARRON (Dolly's father).

CAPTAIN LUCAS WENTWORTH (Dolly's cousin).

PROFESSOR STURGESS.

THE REVEREND JAMES PILCHER (Vicar of Crookbury).

CRIDDLE.

MRS. HARRY TELFER (Dolly).

MRS. STURGESS (Renie).

PETERS (Dolly's maid).

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DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF



ACT I.

SCENE.—THE DRAWING-ROOM AT HARRY TELFER'S,
THE GABLES, CROOKBURY GREEN, SURREY.

Time—THE AFTERNOON OF 1ST JANUARY, 1907.

ACT II.

SCENE.—THE SAME.

Time—AFTER DINNER ON THE SAME DAY.

ACT III.

SCENE.—THE SAME.

Time—LATER ON THE SAME NIGHT.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—THE SAME.

Time—THE AFTERNOON OF 1ST JANUARY, 1908.





ACT I.

SCENE: *Drawing-room at HARRY TELFER'S, The Gables, Crookbury Green, Surrey. A well-furnished room in a modern red brick country house. At the back, a little to the right, is a door leading into the hall with backing of a door. All along the right side is a glass partition, showing a conservatory which is entered by glass doors, one up stage, the other down. On the left side is a large fireplace. At the back, in the centre, is a handsome writing-desk with a shut down flap lid. Above the fireplace, facing the audience is a large sofa. To the right of sofa, and below it in the left centre of the room is a small table, and near to it an easy chair. Right centre down stage is a larger table.*

TIME: *The afternoon of 1st January, 1907.*

Discover at writing-table, back to audience, DOLLY TELFER, a bright little woman about thirty, busied with bills and papers. Bending over her, back to audience, is her father, MATT BARRON, a pleasant-looking, easy-going cynic of sixty. HARRY TELFER, DOLLY'S husband, an ordinary good-natured, weakish, impulsive Englishman about thirty-five, is standing with his back to the fire. Sitting on armchair, reading a scientific book, is PROFESSOR STURGESS, a hard, dry, narrow, fattish scientific man about forty-five. At the table, right, reading a French novel, is RENIE STURGESS, the Professor's wife, a tall, dark, handsome woman about twenty-seven.

Harry.

NO, I can't say that I pay very much attention to sermons as a rule, but Pilcher gave us a regular downright, no-mistake-about-it, rouser at the Watch-night Service last night.

Matt. [*Turning round.*] I wonder what precise difference this rousing sermon will make in the conduct of any person who heard it.

Harry. Well, it's going to make a lot of difference in my conduct. At least, I won't say a lot of difference, because I don't call myself a very bad sort of fellow, do you?

Matt. N-o—No——

Harry. At any rate I'm a thundering good husband, ain't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice.*] And I've got no flagrant vices. But I've got a heap of—well a heap of selfish little habits, such as temper, and so on, and for the coming year I'm going to knock them all off.

Matt. That will be a score for Pilcher—that is, if you do knock them off.

Harry. Oh, I'm thoroughly resolved! I promised Dolly last night, didn't I, Dolly? [*DOLLY takes no notice.*] Dolly too! Dolly was awfully impressed by the sermon, weren't you, Dolly?

Matt. [*Looking round at DOLLY'S back.*] Dolly was awfully impressed?

Harry. Yes. Before we went to bed she gave me her word, that if I'd give her a little help, she'd pay off all her bills, and live within her allowance for the future, didn't you, Dolly?

Matt. Well, that will be another score for Pilcher—that is, if Dolly does live within her allowance.

Harry. Oh, Dolly means it this time, don't you Dolly?

Dolly. [*Turns round on her stool, bills in hand.*] I think it's disgraceful!

Matt. What?

Dolly. These tradespeople! [*Comes down to MATT.*]

I'm almost sure I've paid this bill once—if not twice. Then there's a mistake of thirty shillings in the addition—you're good at figures, Dad. Do add that up for me. My head is so muddled.

[*Giving the bill to MATT.*]

Harry. Aren't you glad, Doll, that you made that resolution not to have any more bills?

Dolly. It will be heavenly! To go about all day with the blessed thought that I don't owe a farthing to anybody. It's awful!

[*Crunching a bill in her hand, and throwing it on to writing-table.*]

Harry. Cheer up, little woman! You don't owe such a very alarming amount, do you?

Dolly. Oh no! Oh no! And if you'll only help me as you promised——

Harry. We'll go thoroughly into it by-and-by. In fact I did mean to give you a pleasant little Christmas surprise, and pay off all your debts.

Dolly. Oh, you angel! But why didn't you do it?

Harry. I've done it so often! You remember the last time?

Dolly. [*Making a wry face.*] Yes, I remember the last time.

Harry. And here we are again!

Dolly. Oh, don't talk like a clown!

Harry. But, my dear Dolly, here we are again.

Dolly. Well, I haven't got the money sense! I simply haven't got it! I was born without it!

Matt. [*Hands her the bill.*] The addition is quite correct.

Dolly. [*Taking the bill.*] You're sure? Then I'm convinced I've paid it! [*Looking at bill.*] Yes! Thirty four, seven, six. Professor Sturgess——

Prof. [*Looks up from his book.*] Yes?

Dolly. You understand all about psychology and the way our brains work.

Prof. I've given my entire life to their study, but I cannot claim that I understand them.

Dolly. But wouldn't you say——

Prof. What?

Dolly. I'm morally certain I've paid this bill.

Matt. Have you got the receipt?

Dolly. No! I must have mislaid it.

Matt. When, and where did you pay it?

Dolly. I cannot recall the exact circumstances. And now——

Matt. And now——?

Dolly. Fulks and Garner have sent me a most impertinent note requesting immediate payment.

Prof. What is the particular brain process that you wish me to explain?

Dolly. How do you account for my having the most vivid impression that I've paid it—so vivid that I cannot shake it off?

Prof. Well—a——

Matt. Isn't it an instance of that obscure operation of the feminine mind whereby the merest wish becomes an accomplished fact?

Dolly. My dear Dad, I actually remember the exact amount: thirty-four, seven, six. Thirty-four, seven, six. I shall never enter Fulks and Garner's shop again!

Enter CRIDDLE. [Announces.] Captain Wentworth!

Enter CAPTAIN LUCAS WENTWORTH, a good-looking smart young army man about thirty. He is in riding-clothes. Exit CRIDDLE. At CAPTAIN WENTWORTH'S entrance RENIE shows keen interest, throws him a secret glance as he goes to shake hands with DOLLY.

Dolly. Ah, Lu! What, over again! Happy New Year once more!

Lucas. Same to you. [*Shaking hands.*] Happy New Year, everybody! Good afternoon, Harry!

[*Nodding to HARRY.*

Harry. Ditto, Lu,

Lucas. Ah, Uncle Matt! Happy New Year!

[*Shaking hands.*]

Matt. Happy New Year, Lucas!

Lucas. Good afternoon, Mrs. Sturgess.

[*Shaking hands with RENIE.*]

Renie. Good afternoon.

Lucas. None the worse for your outing last night, I hope?

Renie. Oh no, I'm sure Mr. Pilcher's sermon ought to make us all very much better.

Dolly. May I introduce you to Professor Sturgess—my cousin Captain Wentworth.

Lucas. How d'ye do?

Prof. How d'ye do?

Matt. So you came over to the Watch-night Service, I hear?

Lucas. Yes! I'd nothing much better to do, and Dolly was cracking up this new parson of yours, so I thought I'd jog over and sample him.

Matt. A dozen miles over here at midnight; an hour's service in a cold church; and a dozen miles back to Aldershot, in the sleet and snow. I hope the sermon thoroughly braced you up!

Lucas. It did. It made me feel just as good as I knew how to be.

Matt. Here's another score for Pilcher!

Dolly. Dad, I think it's shocking bad taste of you to keep on sneering at Mr. Pilcher!

Matt. I'm not sneering. I'm only curious to follow up this wonderful sermon, and trace its results on all of you.

Dolly. Well, you can see its results. [*LUCAS has got near to RENIE, stands with his back to her, takes out a letter from his coat-tail pocket, holds it out for her to take. She takes it, pops it in her novel, and goes on reading. He moves away from her.*] Take only our own family. Harry and I have both turned over a new leaf. Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher had set you thinking deeply—

Renie. Yes, dear, very deeply.

Dolly. Lu, you said the sermon had done you a lot of good.

Lucas. Heaps! I won't say I'm going to set up for a saint straight off, because—well—I'm not so sure I could bring it off, even if I tried——

Matt. That's what holds me back, my wretched nervous fear that I shouldn't bring it off. Still, in justice to Pilcher, I hope you're not going to let his sermon be wasted.

Lucas. Oh, no! My first spare five minutes I'm going to brisk about, and do a bit of New Year's tidying up.

[*He is standing over RENIE, who has opened his letter in her novel; he again exchanges a secret look of understanding with her, and makes a sign to her to go into the conservatory.*]

Enter CRIDDLE.

Criddle. [*Announcing.*] Mr. Pilcher!

Enter the REVEREND JAMES PILCHER, a big, strong, bright, genial, manly, hearty English parson about forty. Exit CRIDDLE.

Dolly. How d'ye do? [*Shaking hands.*]

Pilcher. How d'ye do? Happy New Year, once more! Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

Matt. [*Shaking hands.*] A happy New Year!

Pilcher. How do again, Telfer?

Harry. How are you?

Pilcher. Good morning, Mrs. Sturgess.

Renie. Good morning.

[*At PILCHER'S entrance she has hidden her French novel behind her in the chair. In shaking hands with PILCHER it drops on to the floor and LUCAS'S letter drops out. LUCAS goes to pick it up, PILCHER is*

before him, picks up the novel and letter, looks at title of book, and hands them to RENIE. In taking them she shows some confusion.

Pilcher. [*Genially.*] Improving the New Year by getting a thorough knowledge of Parisian life and manners, I see.

Renie. [*Confused.*] No!—I had begun the book a week ago and so I thought—a—I'd better finish it.

Lucas. Good afternoon, Mr. Pilcher.

Pilcher. Good afternoon.

Lucas. Rattling good sermon you gave us last night.

Pilcher. I'm glad you thought it worth coming so far to hear.

Lucas. Not at all. Jolly well worth coming twice as far for, eh, Mrs. Sturgess?

[*With a sly little look and shake of the head at RENIE.*

Renie. I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Pilcher. [*A little surprised.*] Enjoyed it! Now I meant to make you all very uncomfortable!

Dolly. Oh, you gave us a good shaking up, and we deserved it! I don't think you've met Professor Sturgess?

Pilcher. [*Advancing to PROFESSOR.*] No, but I've read his book, "Man, the Automaton."

Prof. [*Bowing.*] Not with disapproval, I trust?

Pilcher. [*Shaking hands very cordially.*] With the most profound disapproval, with boundless, uncompromising dissent and antagonism!

Prof. I'm sorry!

Pilcher. Why, you deny that man has any vestige of free will.

Prof. Certainly. The longer I live, the more I'm convinced that free will is a purely subjective illusion.

Dolly. Do you mean that when I will to do a certain thing I can't do it? Oh, that's absurd. For instance, I will to go and touch that chair! [*She goes and touches it.*] There! [*Triumphantly.*] I've done it!

That shows I've got free will. [*The PROFESSOR shakes his head.*] Well, then how did I do it?

Prof. I affirm that your willing to touch that chair, or not to touch it, your actual touching it, or not touching it; your possession or non-possession of a criminal impulse——

Dolly. I haven't any criminal impulses——

Prof. [*Shakes his head and goes on.*] Your yielding to that criminal impulse or your not yielding to it—all these states of consciousness are entirely dependent upon the condition, quantity and arrangement of certain atoms in the gray matter of your brain. You think, you will, you act according as that gray matter works. You did not cause or make that condition of the atoms of your gray matter, therefore you are not responsible for thinking or acting in this way or that, seeing that your thoughts, and your actions, and that direction of your impulses which you call your will, are all precisely determined and regulated by the condition and arrangement of these minute atoms of your gray matter!

Dolly. [*Has at first listened with great attention, but has grown bewildered as the PROFESSOR goes on.*] I don't care anything about my gray matter! I've quite made up my mind I won't have any more bills!

Pilcher. [*Turning to RENIE.*] Does Mrs. Sturgess agree with the Professor's doctrine?

Renie. No, indeed! To say that we're mere machines—it's horrid.

Prof. The question is not whether it's horrid, but whether it's true.

Pilcher. What do you think, Mr. Barron?

Matt. It's a very nutty and knotty problem. I'm watching to see Dolly and Harry solve it!

Dolly. See us solve it! How?

Matt. You and Harry heard a most thrilling, soul-stirring sermon last night.

Pilcher. You had good hearsay accounts of my sermon?

Matt. Excellent! I should have heard it myself, but I've reached an age when it would be dangerous to give up any of my old and cherished bad habits. So in place of going to church and selfishly reforming myself, I must be content with watching Dolly and Harry reform themselves.

Dolly. Don't take any notice of him, Mr. Pilcher, he's the most cynical, hardened reprobate! I have to blush for him a hundred times a day.

[RENIE strolls casually into conservatory by lower door. LUCAS casually follows her.]

Matt. And in order to settle once and for all this vexed question of free will and moral responsibility, I'll bet you, Harry, a simple fiver, and I'll bet you Dolly, a new Parisian hat, and half a dozen pairs of gloves that you won't live up to your good resolutions, and that on next New Year's Day you'll neither of you be one ha'penny the better for all the wise counsels Mr. Pilcher gave you last night.

Harry. A fiver! Done!

Dolly. I'll take you, too! In fact, I'll double it; two new Parisian hats, and a dozen pairs of gloves!

Matt. Done, my dear!

Pilcher. I hope I sha'n't be accused of talking shop if I venture to recall that betting was one of the bad habits I especially warned my congregation against, last night!

Harry. By Jove, yes—I'd forgotten all about that! Of course, if you wish us to cry off——

Pilcher. Well, not exactly. I might perhaps suggest an alternative plan which was tried with great success in my late parish——

Dolly. What was that?

Pilcher. A very capital good fellow—an auctioneer and land surveyor, my churchwarden in fact, by name Jobling—found that in spite of constant good resolutions, certain small vices were gradually creeping upon him. There was an occasional outburst of temper to his clerks, an occasional half glass too much; and on

one lamentable market day, he actually discovered himself using bad language to Mrs. Jobling——

Dolly. [*Looking at HARRY.*] Oh! Ah!

Matt. Jobling's gray matter can't have been in good working order.

Pilcher. We corrected that! We got his gray matter under control.

Dolly. How?

Pilcher. My Christmas Blanket Club happened to be on the road to bankruptcy. By the way, our Blanket Club here is in low water. Well, I gave Jobling a small box with a hole at the top sufficiently large to admit half a crown. And I suggested that whenever he was betrayed into one of these little slips, he should fine himself for the benefit of my Blanket Club——

Harry. Good business! Dolly, where's that collecting-box they sent us from the Hospital for Incurables?

Dolly. In the cupboard in the next room.

Harry. Right-o! No time like the present! [*Exit.*]

Matt. And how did you get out of this dilemma?

Pilcher. Dilemma?

Matt. Did your Blanket Club remain in bankruptcy, or what must have been an even more distressing alternative to you, did Jobling continue to use bad language to his wife?

Pilcher. We struck a happy medium. My Blanket Club balance was considerably augmented, and Jobling's behaviour considerably improved under the stress of the fines.

Re-enter HARRY with an old, dusty collecting-box on which is printed in large letters, "County Hospital for Incurables."

Harry. [*Placing the box on the table.*] There! My name's Jobling for the present! By Jove! that was a very neat idea of yours.

Pilcher. Ah, by the way, I didn't give you Jobling's tariff——

Harry. Tariff?

Pilcher. Jobling's tariff for a mild little profanity like "By Jove," was a mere sixpence.

Harry. Oh! [Feels in his pocket.]

Pilcher. Of course you needn't adopt Jobling's scale.

Harry. Oh yes! I'll toe the mark! [Takes sixpence out of his pocket and puts it in his box.] I'm determined I'll cure myself of all these bad little tricks——

Matt. [To DOLLY, pointing to the money-box.] Are you going to contribute?

Dolly. [Snappishly.] Perhaps, when I've paid off my bills.

Matt. [To PILCHER.] Will you kindly let my daughter have your lowest tariff for ladies?

Dolly. Oh, please don't be in such a hurry. What about your own contribution? Mr. Pilcher, I hope you don't intend to let my father escape.

Pilcher. I understood Mr. Barron was prepared to risk a five-pound note that you and Mr. Telfer will not carry your New Year resolutions into practice?

Matt. With the almost certain chance of drawing a five-pound note from Harry and a new hat from Dolly.

Pilcher. I'm afraid I can't hold out those inducements. But I can offer you the very pleasing alternatives of chuckling over your daughter's and Mr. Telfer's lapses, or of contributing five pounds to an excellent charity!

Matt. H'm! Well I'll do my best to oblige you, Mr. Pilcher! Let me see!

[Looking round, his eye falls on RENIE and LUCAS who, at the beginning of the above conversation have gone into conservatory at lower door, and now come out again at upper door. She has a hot-house flower in her hand, and they are eagerly absorbed

in their conversation. The PROFESSOR is reading and not noticing.

Renie. [*Becoming aware that MATT is watching them.*] Yes, that arrangement of the stamens is quite unusual. It's what the gardener calls a "sport"—

Lucas. [*Examining the flower.*] Jolly good sport, too!

Matt. I'm not sure that we haven't even better sport here——

Renie. [*Coming to him.*] Sport? What sport? can we join?

Matt. That's just what I was going to propose. There are four of you here, who heard Mr. Pilcher's excellent discourse last night. And you are all determined to turn over a new leaf this year. Isn't that so?

Dolly. Yes!

Harry. I know I am.

Matt. Mrs. Sturgess?

Renie. Yes, indeed!

Matt. Lucas, you?

Lucas. Yes, Uncle.

Matt. On the first of January next, I am prepared to put a sovereign in this money-box for every one of you who can honestly declare that he has broken himself or herself of his bad habits during the year.

Lucas. I say, not all our bad habits?

Matt. H'm. I don't wish to be exacting—I've no doubt each of you has his own little failing or weakness. Well, come to me and say on your honour that you've conquered this or that pet special weakness—and in goes my sovereign.

Lucas. You don't really mean it?

Matt. Indeed I do. I hope you won't stand out and—spoil sport, eh?

Lucas. Oh, I don't mind coming in—just for the lark of the thing.

Matt. Then you all agree?

Dolly. Oh yes.

Harry. Certainly.

Matt. Mrs. Sturgess?

Renie. We don't know where we may be next Christmas.

Dolly. You'll be here with us. I invite you on the spot. You accept?

Renie. Yes, delighted, if my husband——

Prof. Very pleased.

Matt. Well, Mr. Pilcher, I think I've made your Blanket Club a very handsome offer.

Pilcher. Very handsome. [*Taking out watch.*] I hope our friends will cordially respond, for the sake of my poor parishioners.

Dolly. You'll stay for a cup of tea?

Pilcher. I've heaps of New Year's calls to make. I'm afraid I must be going; good afternoon, Professor!

Prof. Good afternoon.

Pilcher. Good afternoon, Telfer.

Harry. Good afternoon.

Pilcher. Good-bye, Mrs. Sturgess.

Renie. Good-bye. So many thanks for your eloquent sermon. [*Shaking hands.*]

Pilcher. Now, was I eloquent? I suppose I was, since I've produced such an invigorating New Year atmosphere. [*RENIE moves her French novel.*]

Matt. And brought Lucas over from Aldershot in the snow!

Lucas. Rather! I shall come again next year.

[*Shaking hands.*]

Pilcher. Do. And then we shall be able to estimate the effect of my eloquence.

Matt. [*Tapping the money-box.*] We shall!

Pilcher. Good-bye, Mrs. Telfer.

Dolly. Good-bye.

[*Rings bell.*]

Pilcher. Good-bye, Mr. Barron.

Matt. Good-bye.

[*Shakes hands.*]

Pilcher. You might be inclined to risk a sovereign on yourself for the Blanket Club?

Matt. I daren't. I can't trust my gray matter—I should make a dreadful fiasco.

Pilcher. Mrs. Telfer, I leave him in your hands.

[*Exit* PILCHER.]

Matt. Dolly, now that the parson's gone, I don't mind having that new Parisian hat on with you.

Dolly. Done! I don't mind how much I punish you.

Prof. [*Taking out his watch.*] Half past three, my dear.

Renie. I don't think I'll go out this afternoon.

Prof. Oh, you'd better take your little constitutional. You missed it yesterday. I'm sure your restlessness is due to your not taking regular exercise.

Renie. Which way are you going? [*Yawning.*]

Prof. My usual round, up to the White House and back by the fish-pond.

Renie. Perhaps I'll join you at the fish-pond.

Prof. [*To MATT.*] Nothing like living by rule and measure.

Matt. I shouldn't wonder. I've never tried it.

Prof. I ascribe my constant good health and contentment to my unvarying routine of work and diet and exercise. [*Exit.*]

Matt. Then where do my constant good health and contentment come from?

Lucas. Dolly, I left my evening kit here. Could you put me up for the night?

Dolly. Delighted! You'll make up our rubber.

Lucas. Right!

Matt. Not going to ride back to Aldershot again to-night?

Lucas. Not to-night, thank you.

Matt. Just a shade too bracing, eh?

Lucas. Just a shade! Dolly, I haven't seen your new fish-pond. Is anybody going to meet the Professor?

[*Glancing at RENIE.*]

Matt. I am. [*Linking his arm in LUCAS'S.*] We'll

get into an unvarying routine of exercise for the next hour. Come along!

[*Takes LUCAS off as he is exchanging a look with RENIE. RENIE makes to follow them, stops at door, turns back a little, stops, takes out LUCAS'S letter from her French novel, goes to fire and reads it. Meanwhile the following scene takes place between DOLLY and HARRY.*

Harry. [*To DOLLY.*] Now, Dolly, we can go through your bills. [*Going to her writing-desk.*

Dolly. Yes. Hadn't I better sort them out first?

Harry. [*Taking up bills.*] Oh, I'll help you sort them out——

Dolly. Take care! You'll muddle all my papers. [*Taking bills out of his hands, and closing down the writing-desk.*] I want to have a little talk with Renie—you'd better join them at the fish-pond.

Harry. Well, so long as you do get them sorted, and squared up. What about after tea?

Dolly. All right. After tea.

Harry. After tea. We'll have a nice cosy half-hour, all to ourselves, and sweep them all out of our minds.

[*With a gesture.*

Dolly. [*Nods cheerfully.*] Yes, a nice cosy half-hour and sweep them all out of our minds. [*With his gesture. Exit HARRY briskly. She repeats his gesture.*] Sweep them all out of our minds. [*Opening desk and regarding bills with dismay.*] Oh, don't I wish I could! Oh, Renie!

[*RENIE is busy with her letter at the fire.*

Renie. [*Puts letter into pocket.*] What is it?

Dolly. [*Has taken up one or two bills.*] These bills! These awful bills! These vampires!

Renie. Yes, dear! I suppose it's rather dreadful, but it must be sweet to have a dear, kind husband who'll pay them all off.

Dolly. Harry? He made a dreadful fuss last time. And then I didn't show him all.

Renie. Well, dear, after all, it's only bills——

Dolly. Only bills! Only? Well, I'm going to show him every one this time. And what a lesson it shall be to me! That's why I'm so grateful to Mr. Pilcher.

Renie. Why?

Dolly. Yesterday afternoon I thought I'd screw up my courage to go through the bills just to see where I was. My dear, I was paralysed! I had the most appalling time! Well, Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time. I thought "what an idiot I must be to endure all this misery just for want of a little resolution."

Renie. Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time for me too.

Dolly. Did it?

Renie. I had an awful afternoon yesterday!

Dolly. You?! You haven't any bills?

Renie. No! [*Sighs.*] I almost wish I had.

Dolly. Wish you had?!

Renie. I almost envy you the delicious experience of having to confess——

Dolly. Yes dear, you always were fond of scenes, but I'm not!

Renie. And then the heavenly feeling of being forgiven, and taken in the arms of the man you love!

Dolly. Yes, that part of it is all right. It's what comes before—— [*With a little shudder.*]

Renie. After all, your husband isn't a machine. He is a human being!

Dolly. Oh, Harry's a perfect dear in most things, but he has got a temper!

Renie. My husband never even swears at me! Oh, Dolly, you are lucky!

Dolly. Hum!

Renie. Oh, Dolly—— [*Sighs and goes away.*]

Dolly. Is anything the matter?

Renie. No dear. Nothing, except—oh, life is so hard! so hard!

Dolly. Renie, if you're in trouble——

Renie. Thank you, dear. I knew you'd help me.

Dolly. Yes, so long as it isn't money. And even then I'd help you, only I can't.

Renie. It isn't money. [*Looking at DOLLY curiously.*] I wonder if you would understand.

Dolly. I'll do my best.

Renie. It's such a strange story. [*Moving away. DOLLY makes a little dubious grimace behind her back.*] Dolly, I will trust you. You know I thoroughly admire and honour my husband?

Dolly. Yes. When you were engaged you called him "This great protagonist of science."

Renie. That was how he appeared to my foolish girl's imagination. But now——

Dolly. Now?

Renie. You know that, however tempted, nothing could induce me to wrong him for a moment.

Dolly. No, but is there anybody—Renie, who is it?

Renie. Give me your sacred promise you'll never breathe a word to any living soul?

Dolly. Not a word—who is it?

Renie. Not even to your husband?

Dolly. Not even to my husband. Who is it?

Renie. Well, dear, you know what my life has been. Few women have met with so little real sympathy as I. Few women have suffered——

Dolly. No, dear. Who is it? Do I know him?

Renie. Your cousin Lucas has a deep and sincere admiration for me.

Dolly. Lu!? Of course! I might have known he'd never ride a dozen miles in the snow for a sermon! It's disgraceful of him!

Renie. No, dear, he's not to blame. We are neither of us to blame.

Dolly. [*Contemptuously.*] Oh! Why you haven't known him a month, have you?

Renie. I met him for the first time in this room three weeks ago last Thursday afternoon.

Dolly. It's a great pity the Professor didn't come down with you.

Renie. That would have made no difference. It had to be!

Dolly. What had to be? Renie, how far has this gone? You've been meeting him alone——

Renie. Once or twice. But, however often I may have met him, he has offered me nothing but the most chivalrous attention. He has always respected me——

Dolly. Well then, he mustn't respect you any more. It must be stopped.

Renie. Dolly, I didn't expect you to take up this attitude.

Dolly. You don't suppose I'm going to have this sort of thing in my own house, do you?

Renie. What sort of thing?

Dolly. Do you remember the awful row I got into at school when your boy's love letter was discovered in the Banbury cakes you'd persuaded me to take in for you?

Renie. But you received Banbury cakes of your own!

Dolly. Not since I've been married. Of course before your marriage your outrageous flirting didn't much matter——

Renie. Outrageous flirting? — If I seemed to flirt——

Dolly. Seemed?!

Renie. It was only in the vain hope of meeting with one who could offer me the perfect homage that I have always felt would one day be mine.

Dolly. Well, he mustn't offer it here! I shall tell him so very plainly. He'd better not stay to dinner.

Renie. There is no reason Captain Wentworth should not stay to dinner. He has given me the one absolutely blameless unselfish devotion of his life. I've accepted it on that distinct understanding. I've trusted you with my secret, a secret honourable

alike to Captain Wentworth and myself. You've promised not to breathe a word to any living soul. You surely don't mean to break your word?

Dolly. I don't mean to stand the racket of your Banbury cakes.

Renie. I didn't expect you to be so unsympathetic. You promised to help me!

Dolly. Help you! How did you expect me to help you?

Renie. My husband has to go to Edinburgh next week to give a course of lectures there.

Dolly. Well?

Renie. He wants me to go with him. Dearest, it would be perfectly sweet of you to ask me to stay on another fortnight here.

Dolly. [*Makes a little movement of indignant surprise.*] I see!

Renie. There could be no possible harm in it now that you know our attachment is quite innocent and that you can look after me every moment. Dearest, you might oblige me in a tiny little matter like this.

Dolly. [*After a pause.*] I'll think it over——

Renie. Thank you so much.

Dolly. Renie, you said Mr. Pilcher's sermon came just in the nick of time——

Renie. So it did.

Dolly. You don't call this the "nick of time"?!

Renie. Yes, indeed. I went to church in a perfect fever. I didn't know what to do. Well, as I listened to Mr. Pilcher everything became quite clear to me. I resolved I would accept Captain Wentworth's pure unselfish devotion and make it a lever to raise all my ideals and aspirations!

Dolly. But there wasn't anything in Mr. Pilcher's sermon about——

Renie. Oh yes, there was a lot about ideals and aspirations.

Dolly. Yes, but not the sort of aspirations you have

for Lucas. I suppose you know he makes love to every woman he comes across?

Renie. He told me he had been led into one or two unworthy attachments.

Dolly. Yes! That's quite right. So he has! One or two!

Renie. That was before he met me.

Dolly. Yes, and this will be before he meets the next lady.

Renie. [*Looks at DOLLY severely.*] My dear Dolly, with your light frivolous nature it is impossible for you to understand a pure and exalted attachment like ours. Listen! [*Taking out a letter.*] This will show you his fine nature, his fine feelings—"From the first moment I saw you——"

MATT enters.

Renie. [*Putting letter in pocket.*] Well, have you had a pleasant walk?

Matt. Very pleasant—and instructive. The Professor asked me to remind you that he's waiting for you at the fish-pond.

Renie. I'd better go. I shall get a little lecture all to myself if I don't. [*Going off, to DOLLY.*] Thank you, dear, so much for your kind invitation to stay on!

Dolly. Don't mention it!

Renie. I shall try to manage it. [*Exit.*]

Dolly. Yes, I'm sure you will.

Matt. Mrs. Sturgess going to stay on?

Dolly. She wants me to invite her. But I won't if I can help it. [*Goes to him suddenly.*] Dad!

Matt. Well?

Dolly. That wretched Lucas!

Matt. What about him?

Dolly. No, I've promised her not to breathe a word. So you must guess. [*Pause.*] Have you guessed?

Matt. [*After a pause.*] Yes. Well, I——[*Begins to chuckle.*] So Lucas is up to his old games!

Dolly. My own guest! Under my own roof! It's too horrid of him.

Matt. [*Chuckling.*] It is! It's too bad! The rascal!

Dolly. Oh, it's more than half her fault! It's just like her!

[*MATT suddenly bursts from a chuckle into a roar.*]

Dolly. What are you laughing at?

Matt. I've just left—— [*Chuckling.*] I've just left the Professor down at the fish-pond explaining to Lucas all about his gray matter, and—— [*Roars.*]

Dolly. I don't see anything to laugh at.

Matt. Twelve miles in the snow—I say, Doll, we're making a splendid start for the New Year!

[*Laughing.*]

Dolly. Dad! Will you please leave off? [*Shaking his shoulder.*] Will you be serious?

Matt. Yes, my dear! [*Pulling himself together and straightening his features.*] Yes, I will. After all, it's a serious matter.

Dolly. It's very serious for me, in a neighbourhood like this!

Matt. It's serious for me, as I was Lucas's guardian. And it's serious for him. If he goes and plays the fool, it may spoil his career—the young ass!

Dolly. Very well, then, will you please treat it seriously and set to work and help me?

Matt. How far have matters gone?

Dolly. Oh, there's no real harm done at present.

Matt. How do you know?

Dolly. Oh, Lucas is writing her silly letters and she's talking about his pure and exalted devotion, and making it a lever to raise all her ideals and aspirations.

Matt. [*Shakes his head.*] That looks bad! That looks very dangerous for her.

Dolly. Oh, no; she knows how to take care of herself. But it's dangerous for me!

Matt. How, dangerous for you?!

Dolly. If there's the least bit of scandal she'll contrive to drag me into it! I know her so well.

Matt. [*Walking about, cogitating.*] Yes, and we mustn't let Lucas make a mess of it.

Dolly. What can we do?

Matt. When I was over at Aldershot last week Sir John said something about giving Lucas an A.D.C. in India. I'll drive over to-morrow and ask Sir John to pack Lucas out of the country for a year or two!

Dolly. That's a good idea. But it may take some time?

Matt. A week or so, perhaps more.

Dolly. But if they find out they're going to be parted, it's just this next week when there will be all the danger.

Matt. That's true.

Dolly. They ought to be parted to-night.

Matt. They ought! They ought! Not a doubt about it! Not a shadow of doubt! They ought to be parted to-night!

Dolly. Dad! I believe I can frighten Renie out of it.

Matt. Frighten her?

Dolly. I'll try! And you must take Lucas in hand——

Matt. H'm! Isn't Harry the right person——?

Dolly. No, I sha'n't tell Harry. Harry would only get into a temper and muddle it. No, you must get Lucas to take himself off.

Matt. Take himself off!

Dolly. I won't have him here. You can tell him so. [*H'm.*] Be very severe with him.

Matt. [*Dubious.*] H'm!

Dolly. Take a very high tone.

Matt. I'm not sure that taking a high tone is quite in my line.

Dolly. Then please try it. Dad, you do realize how very serious this is, don't you?

Matt. Yes, of course. Very well, I'll tackle Lucas. We'll see what a high tone will do with him. Heigho! Sad! Sad!! Sad!!!—Sad! Sad!! Sad!!!

Dolly. Hush!

LUCAS and HARRY enter. LUCAS looks round for RENIE. DOLLY and MATT talk in whispers as if settling a plan. HARRY goes up to the collecting-box, takes out his knife and begins to scrape off the label.

Dolly. [In a very severe tone to LUCAS, who is peeping into conservatory.] Are you looking for anything?

Lucas. I was wondering whether there was any tea going.

Dolly. [Same severe tone.] The tea is not in the conservatory.

Lucas. No, but I thought it might be getting on to the time——

Dolly. [Same tone.] The tea will be served in due course.

Lucas. [Surprised at her tone.] Is anything the matter?

[DOLLY looks at him severely, says nothing, turns to MATT. LUCAS looks puzzled, goes away, and again looks furtively into conservatory for RENIE.]

Harry. [Scraping away at the collecting-box.] Don't forget Doll—our cosy half hour after tea——

[Nodding at the writing-desk.]

Dolly. I won't forget.

Matt. [Has come up behind HARRY, touches the arm he is scraping with.] Hospital for Incurables! I shouldn't scrape that off at present.

CURTAIN.



(Four or five hours pass between Acts I and II.)

ACT II.

SCENE: *The same, on the same evening, after dinner.*
Enter RENIE, much distressed and agitated,
DOLLY follows quickly, closes the door cautiously
and mysteriously.

Renie.

BUT I don't understand. Captain Wentworth
and I have been so little together——

Dolly. Well, my dear, there it is! My
father is the last man to pry into other
people's affairs, but you see it has been forced upon
his notice. And from the tone he took——

Renie. What tone?

Dolly. He was very severe.

Renie. [*Alarmed.*] But what did he say he had
seen?

Dolly. He wouldn't go into particulars. He seemed
very much upset——

Renie. Upset?!

Dolly. Perhaps I ought to say shocked.

Renie. Shocked?!

Dolly. And when my father is shocked it must be
something very glaring——

Renie. [*More and more alarmed.*] But there hasn't
been anything glaring——

Dolly. Well, dear, of course, you know.

Renie. But I cannot imagine——[*Suddenly.*] It must have been that day at the stile!

Dolly. Perhaps. What happened? No, I don't wish to hear——

Renie. Captain Wentworth assisted me over the stile——

Dolly. Well?——

Renie. That's all. He may have taken a little longer about it than was quite necessary, and I may have leaned a little heavier than the circumstances required. But it was all done in perfectly good taste.

Dolly. [*Shakes her head.*] It can't have been the stile.

Renie. Then what ——? [*Cudgels her brains.*] The dairy!

Dolly. Very likely. Was that very—no, don't tell me——

Renie. There's nothing to tell. The woman at the farm, Mrs.——

Dolly. Biggs——

Renie. Biggs, asked me to go over her model dairy.

Dolly. Did she ask Lucas?

Renie. He came. Mrs. Biggs insisted on our tasting her mince pies——

Dolly. Mince pies——Yes?

Renie. While she went to get one——

Dolly. Get one——

Renie. She wasn't out of the dairy ten seconds——

Dolly. No—and then?

Renie. Captain Wentworth——a——

Dolly. Respected you!

Renie. [*Firing up.*] He is always most respectful! In the most delicate, exquisitely chivalrous way, he implored me for one first and only kiss, and just as I was refusing him, somebody passed the dairy windows——

Dolly. My father often strolls that way——

Renie. But I was quite cold and correct——[*Very anxiously.*] Dolly, tell me exactly what Mr. Barron said?

Dolly. At first he was going to speak to you himself, but I said, "No, that's my duty! I'm her oldest friend; I'll talk to her!"

Renie. Ye—es?

Dolly. So, at last he consented, and said: "Very well. Be very firm with her, because this sort of thing taking place under my very nose and under my daughter's roof is what I cannot, and will not, tolerate for one moment!"

Renie. He must have passed the dairy windows!

Dolly. Yes.

Renie. And jumped to a wrong conclusion.

Dolly. Yes. And that isn't the worst——

Renie. [*Freshly alarmed.*] Not the worst?!

Dolly. Now, don't be alarmed, dear——

Renie. About what?

Dolly. Didn't you notice something strange in your husband's manner at dinner?

Renie. No. What makes you think——?

Dolly. My dear, if my father noticed it, why not your husband? Suppose all this time the Professor has been quietly, stealthily watching you and Lucas.

Renie. [*Alarmed.*] Dolly!

Dolly. And waiting his time——

Renie. Oh, Dolly!

Dolly. Didn't you notice how he insisted on your going to the fish-pond?

Renie. Yes, he did!

Dolly. Didn't it strike you there was something in that?

Renie. No, and he hasn't said anything——

Dolly. Of course not. Naturally he would hide his suspicions from you till the right moment.

Renie. Right moment?

Dolly. Now, dear, you see how serious things are. You mustn't run any more risks. This must be broken off to-night.

Renie. To-night?!

Dolly. Now, what can I do to help you?

Renie. You might tell Mr. Barron there was nothing in the dairy windows.

Dolly. Of course I'll tell him, but if he saw——

Renie. But there was nothing. Absolutely nothing——

Dolly. No, dear. What else can I do?

Renie. Could you find out exactly how much he has seen and heard, and—a—pump him a little?

Dolly. I don't like pumping people—still—What else?

Renie. [*Breaking down.*] Oh, Dolly, this blow could not have fallen at a more cruel moment.

Dolly. No, dear.

Renie. It came just when I had lost all the illusions of girlhood, when all my woman's nature began to cry out——

Dolly. Yes—[*Suddenly.*] Hark! [*Listens.*] Hush!

[*Creeps up to door, listens, opens it, looks out, closes it again.*]

Renie. What was it?

Dolly. Hush! Voices! I thought it might be Lucas and the Professor quarrelling.

Renie. I really don't think my husband suspects——

Dolly. No, I daresay it's only my imagination.

Renie. And if he did—Dolly, is there one man living, except my husband, who would condemn me for being the object of a noble, single-hearted devotion like Captain Wentworth's?

Dolly. No, dear, perhaps not. But, you see, as husbands they take quite a different view of things from what they do merely as men.

Renie. Tell me candidly, Dolly, you see nothing wrong in it, do you?

Dolly. Well, dear, when you say wrong——

Renie. But I assure you there isn't—nothing could be further from my thoughts.

Dolly. No, dear—still, people are so full of prejudice—now what can I do?

Renie. Oh, Dolly, you can help me so much.

Dolly. [*A little alarmed.*] Can I? Tell me——

Renie. If Lucas and I are parted——[*Breaks down.*]
I can't bear it! I can't bear it!

Dolly. Try, dear! Try!

Renie. [*Sobbing.*] I will. And if at any time I long to hear how he bears our separation, you won't mind receiving a letter, and sending it on to me?

Dolly. I'm afraid I couldn't do that, dear. You see, I'm so careless, and if I left the letter about, and Harry found it—no, dear——

Renie. You won't help me?

Dolly. Yes, dear, I'll do anything in my power!
[*Suddenly.*] I'll tell you what I can do!

Renie. Yes?

Dolly. My father is telling Lucas he must leave to-night. Well, I can spare you all the pain and misery of saying "Good-bye," and take one last message to him.

Renie. [*Curtly.*] No, thank you. It's most unkind of you to send him away like this. I must see him alone before he goes.

Dolly. [*Shakes her head.*] My father insists, and suppose Lucas feels that he owes it to your reputation to go quietly——

Renie. Without seeing me?!

Dolly. And suppose the Professor is really watching you——

[*RENIE shows great perplexity. DOLLY is watching her.*]

Dolly. If you don't see Lucas, what message shall I take him?

Renie. Tell him how proud I am of his noble, unselfish devotion; tell him I shall always look upon it as the one supreme happiness of my life to have known him—tell him that——

The PROFESSOR and MATTHEW enter. The PROFESSOR has diagrams and illustrations in his hand. Following the PROFESSOR and MATT are HARRY and LUCAS. LUCAS, after a little time, comes up to DOLLY and RENIE, who are seated on sofa. The PROFESSOR is speaking to MATT as he enters, and is showing him an illustration.

Prof. [In his hard, metallic voice.] Observe that woman's facial angle—[*pointing*] the peculiar curve of the lip, and the irregular formation of the nose.

[Describing a little upward curve on the paper with his thumb.

Matt. I have seen sweeter things in ladies' lips and noses.

[Describing the same little upward curve with his thumb on the paper.

Prof. Can you be surprised at her history?

Matt. Who was she?

Prof. Jane Sweetman, the notorious trigamist. Looking at that woman's cranium I maintain it was impossible for her to avoid——

Matt. Committing trigamy?

Prof. Well, some species of grave moral delinquency.

[DOLLY clutches RENIE'S wrist significantly.

The PROFESSOR hands the illustration to HARRY, who examines it. MATT moves away a step and unobtrusively feels his own nose and forehead.

Harry. [Has examined the illustration.] By Jove, yes—anybody can see she was bound to come a moral cropper, eh?

[He hands the illustration to DOLLY, who passes it to RENIE, with a very significant glance, pointing out something on the paper. LUCAS leans over the back of the sofa between RENIE and DOLLY to look

at the illustration. As he leans on the back of the sofa, DOLLY draws herself up very indignantly, gives him a severe look; moves a little away from him, sits and looks very severely in front of her. He cannot understand her attitude, draws back a little and looks puzzled.

Prof. [Bringing out another illustration, offering it to MATT.] Now look at this.

Matt. Somebody's brains!

Prof. Tell me if you notice anything peculiar.

[HARRY leans over MATT'S shoulder, and looks at the illustration. LUCAS again leans over the sofa, between DOLLY and RENIE. DOLLY again moves a little further away from him with another indignant look. LUCAS is again puzzled, but bends and looks over the illustration in RENIE'S hands.

Lucas. So that's Jane Sweetman! Well, if Jane was bound to come a moral cropper, I'm very glad I wasn't bound to come a moral cropper with Jane, eh, Dolly? [Very pleasantly.]

Dolly. [Very severely.] I should scarcely have thought you troubled whom you came a moral cropper with!

[Looks at him severely, goes up to writing-desk, seats herself and writes letter. He feels himself snubbed, and moves a step or two back, stands and looks puzzled. PROFESSOR has been critically regarding MATT and HARRY, who have been looking at the illustration.

Prof. Well, does anything strike you?

Matt. No. [Holding it out.] Looks rather pulpy—rather—a—squashy—

Prof. Exactly! Observe the soft, almost watery condition of that gray matter. What is the inevitable consequence?

Matt. I couldn't quite say—whom did that gray matter belong to?

Prof. Harriet Poy.

Matt. I don't remember Harriet——

Prof. The Pyromaniac. At the age of four set fire to her mother's bed. At twelve was found saturating blankets with petroleum; at sixteen fired three hay-ricks, for which she was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Matt. Poor Harriet! But of course if her gray matter went and got watery——

Prof. Just so! I maintain that with her gray matter in that condition it was a stupid crime to send her to prison.

Dolly. But what are we to do with people whose gray matter goes wrong?

Prof. I propose to deal with that question at Edinburgh. [*To MATT.*] You might, perhaps, care to run down to Edinburgh for my lectures——

Matt. I should love it above all things; but the fact is, I'm so thoroughly of your opinion——

Prof. Are you?! I'm delighted I've convinced you.

Matt. Completely. All my life I've been doing things I should never have dreamed of doing if my gray matter had done its duty and not got watery.

Harry. Yes, when you come to think of all the rotten things you find yourself doing, you feel, by Jove——

*[Suddenly recalls that he has said "by Jove,"
pulls sixpence out of his pocket and drops
it in the box.]*

Matt. Bravo, Harry!

[Patting him.]

Harry. Oh, I mean it!—Professor, isn't it time for our hundred up?

Prof. [*Taking out watch.*] In two minutes.

Harry. I'll go and get the table ready. [*Going up to door.*] Doll, [*taps the writing-desk*] you put it off after tea—by-and-by, you know!

Dolly. [*She has finished letter, has risen, and closed writing-desk.*] By-and-by.

Harry. Before we go to bed—don't forget.

Dolly. Oh, I sha'n't forget.

[*Makes a wry face.* Exit HARRY.]

Prof. Renie, you were complaining of headache. It would be wise to take a short stroll in the cool air.

Renie. Oh, very well.

Prof. Wrap up thoroughly. Ten minutes, not longer.

[*Exit.* DOLLY, unseen by RENIE and LUCAS, slips the note she has been writing into MATT'S hands. He takes it down stage, right, and reads it. RENIE and LUCAS have been talking apart; they move towards the door to get out, but DOLLY is standing in the way of their exit.]

Dolly. Oh, Renie! I'll put on my things, and come with you.

Renie. But Captain Wentworth has offered——

Dolly. I've a splitting headache—I must get a little air. And Dad wants to have a talk with Lucas, don't you?

Matt. If he can spare five minutes.

Lucas. Won't by-and-by be just as convenient?

Dolly. [*Facing LUCAS, speaking firmly.*] No, by-and-by will not be just as convenient. Now, Renie, we'll leave them together.

[*Gets RENIE off, turns, looks daggers at LUCAS, goes off after RENIE, closes door in his face. He opens it, and goes after her.*]

Lucas. I say, Doll, what's up? [*Follows her off.*] What's the matter?

Matt. [*Reading DOLLY'S note.*] "Be very severe with him. Make a great point of the dairy windows. He'll understand." Dairy windows?

[*Puts the note in his pocket, as LUCAS re-enters, puzzled and disappointed.*]

Lucas. I can't think what's the matter with Dolly. She has done nothing but snub me all the evening.

Matt. [*Looking at him sternly.*] So I should imagine!

Lucas. [*Startled by his manner.*] I say, have I done anything?

Matt. Done anything! I'm a man of the world! nobody can accuse me of being strait-laced, and therefore I suppose you think you can come here and set at defiance all the—it's disgraceful!

Lucas. Would you mind telling me what you're hinting at?

Matt. I'm not hinting! I'm going to speak out very plainly, and I tell you that I look upon your conduct as something—something atrocious!

Lucas. I say, Uncle, what's all this about?

Matt. What's it about? What's it about? It's about the dairy windows!

Lucas. Then it was you—pshaw!—so it was you?

Matt. Well, after the dairy windows, can you stand there and tell me you aren't thoroughly, completely, heartily ashamed of yourself?

Lucas. Well, I suppose I am. But, after all, it wasn't so very bad——

Matt. Not bad?!

Lucas. Well, not so d—ee—d awful.

Matt. [*Regards him for a few moments.*] Well, I'm astonished! If you don't consider your behaviour d—ee—d awful, will you please find me some word that will describe it?

Lucas. You know you're putting a much worse construction on this than the necessities of the case demand.

Matt. What?!

Lucas. I've nothing to reproach myself with. Mrs. Biggs wasn't out of the dairy three minutes, and you were hanging about the windows all the time.

Matt. I was hanging about the windows?

Lucas. Yes, and I must say that when you saw two people engaged in an interesting conversation the least you could do was to pass on and take no notice.

Matt. "Interesting conversation"?!

Lucas. Well, what did you call it? If it comes to that, what do you accuse me of?

Matt. Well, here you are, on the first day of the year, after listening to a most eloquent sermon, after making a solemn resolution to give up all your bad habits——

Lucas. Excuse me, I expressly stated that I didn't mean to give up *all* my bad habits. And I don't call this a bad habit.

Matt. You don't call making love to a married woman a bad habit?!

Lucas. Of course in one sense it is a bad habit. But it isn't a bad habit in the sense that other bad habits are bad habits. Look at all the decent chaps who've been led into it!

Matt. That doesn't excuse you. And if you think that I'm going to countenance your conduct, you are very much mistaken in your estimate of my character.

Lucas. [*Very quietly.*] May I ask you one simple question?

Matt. Well?

Lucas. When you were my age, if you found yourself alone in a dairy with a good-looking woman, and she was good for a dozen kisses or so, wouldn't you have taken advantage of it?

Matt. No!

Lucas. Not at my age?

Matt. No—no——

Lucas. Well, what would you have done?

Matt. I should have summoned all my resolution——

Lucas. Oh, that be hanged! Come, Uncle, no humbug! Man to man!

Matt. Well, I don't say that at your age I might not have been tempted—and of course we must all go through a certain amount of experience, or how should we be able to advise you youngsters?

Lucas. I say, no confounded nonsense—your uncle Archie——

Matt. Dear old chap!

Lucas. What use did you make of his advice?

Matt. Well, I remember his talking to me very seriously—I suppose I was about your age—did I ever tell you, Lucas, [*taking LUCAS'S arm affectionately*] about a very remarkable auburn-haired girl, Madge Seaforth?

Lucas. No.

Matt. And my racing her across Salisbury Plain at night?

Lucas. No.

Matt. Forty-eight miles one glorious May night! I let her beat me! God bless her! I let her beat me! And just as the sun rose we caught sight of Salisbury spire.

Lucas. Sounds rather jolly!

Matt. Jolly? Jolly? It was romance! It was poetry! Ah! Lu, my boy, you may say what you like, there's nothing like it on this side heaven. I told you about Mrs.—never mind her name—dressing up as a widow.

Lucas. No?

Matt. Well, I bet the little hussy a fiver—I can see her face, as she stepped out of the cupboard, with the wickedest twinkle in the wickedest black eye! Ho! Ho! Heigho! Sad! Sad!! Sad!!!—Sad! Sad!! Sad!!! Come, come, Lucas! This won't do! This will never do! Now to get back to this business of yours——

Lucas. Well——

Matt. When I was your guardian I let you have a pretty good fling?

Lucas. You did!

Matt. The pace was rather scorching, wasn't it?

Lucas. Rather!

Matt. I never pulled you up, did I?

Lucas. No, and I'm grateful.

[*Shaking hands very cordially.*]

Matt. That's all right. Now, old chap, you've got to pull up!

Lucas. Pull up?

Matt. Short. This Mrs. Sturgess—Dolly says there's a lot of nonsense going on, gushing letters and so on,—damned silly thing writing letters, Lu——

Lucas. Yes, I know.

Matt. Well, what do you do it for?

Lucas. I don't know.

Matt. You're seeing her every day. If you must carry on this tomfoolery, why not do it by word of mouth? Why write it down, to show what an ass you've been?

Lucas. I'm sure I don't know.

Matt. Do you know why you're carrying on with her at all?

Lucas. Well, she's a good-looking woman, and naturally a chap—naturally——

Matt. You're either in love with her, or you aren't?

Lucas. I can't say I'm exactly in love with her——

Matt. Then why are you making love to her?

Lucas. Well, naturally a chap—naturally—I don't know that I ain't a bit in love with her.

Matt. Well, it doesn't much matter. If you aren't in love with her you're a fool to risk a scandal. If you are in love you'll most likely do some silly jackass thing that will knock your career on the head, eh?

Lucas. Well, when you look at it that way——

Matt. Look at it that way! Anyhow, she's a married woman, and you're here as a guest—it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

Lucas. No, it isn't.

Matt. Very well, then, don't do it. Don't do it! Cut it! You will?

Lucas. I've got to, I suppose.

Matt. Yes, you've got to. You can tell Doll I gave it to you hot and strong, and you're going to clear out, and not see Mrs. Sturgess again——

Lucas. Not see her again?

Matt. Isn't that what you mean to do?

Lucas. Yes, I suppose. I say, what did you see at the dairy windows?

Matt. I didn't see anything at all!

Lucas. Nothing at all?

Matt. I wasn't there!

Lucas. Then how——?

Matt. Dolly put me up to it. [Laughs at him.]

Lucas. Dolly?

DOLLY enters with a cloak which she throws on chair.

Matt. Ah, Doll——

Dolly. [Looking severely at LUCAS.] Have you spoken to him?

Matt. Yes, very seriously, extra seriously, and he's going to do the right thing and clear out, aren't you, Lucas?

Lucas. [A little unwillingly.] Yes.

Matt. Good chap! Good chap!

Dolly. [Still a little severe.] I'm pleased to hear it. [To LUCAS.] You've behaved in a most scandalous——

Matt. He has. I've to'd him all that. [Winks at DOLLY to keep her quiet.] And he sees it quite plainly, don't you? [Winks at LUCAS to prompt him.]

Dolly. Then it's quite broken off?

Matt. Quite! Isn't it, Lu?

Lucas. Yes, I suppose. I should like to say——

Dolly. Yes?

Lucas. That nothing has taken place which, if rightly looked at, could reflect discredit either upon the lady, or, I hope, upon myself. And secondly, whatever fault there may have been, is entirely mine.

Matt. That's satisfactory! It always ought to be the man's fault. Heaven forbid it should ever be their's. Good chap! Good chap! [Patting him.] Dolly, he's behaving splendidly. Now, Lu, good-night! [DOLLY rings bell.]

Lucas. [*Surprised.*] Good-night?!

Dolly. Good-night, and good-bye!

[*Holding out her hand.*]

Lucas. You aren't going to turn me out to-night!

Dolly. You said it was quite broken off.

Lucas. Yes, but——[*turns to MATT with appealing gesture*] Uncle, you didn't mean to pack me off like this——

Matt. Yes, my boy! Remember the occasion. First day of the New Year. Take time by the forelock. Off you go!

[*Taking him by the shoulder and trying to get him off.*]

Lucas. [*Resisting.*] Oh no! I don't see it in that light at all. [*Sinks comfortably into arm-chair.*]

CRIDDLE *appears at door.*

Dolly. Criddle, please have Captain Wentworth's portmanteau taken to the billiard-room.

Criddle. Yes, ma'am.

Dolly. He wishes to change there, and please send to the Red Lion and ask them to have Captain Wentworth's horse saddled.

Criddle. Yes, ma'am.

Lucas. Criddle, what's the weather like?

Criddle. It's a bit colder, sir. Looks as if we were going to have another heavy fall of snow.

Lucas. I don't think I'll go to-night, Criddle. If I want the gee saddled, I'll go and tell them myself.

Criddle. Yes, sir. [*Exit.*]

Lucas. [*In arm-chair.*] I say, Dolly, you don't really expect me to go careering over that heath at this ungodly hour?

Dolly. You can't stay here. Renie is very much upset; she has had hysterics. So I've put her in the spare room.

Lucas. Well, you can give me a shake-down somewhere—in the billiard-room.

Dolly. [*Shakes her head.*] I can't ask the servants to make up impossible beds in impossible places at this hour.

Lucas. I call this beastly unfair of you, Doll.

Dolly. Unfair?

Lucas. Just as I'd summoned up all my resolution to do the right thing, and avoid ructions for your sake, you pounce down on me, and order me off the premises, and——

Dolly. [*Getting angry.*] If you don't behave yourself and go off quietly, I shall have to order you off the premises.

[Makes an appeal by gesture to MATT to get him off.]

Matt. Now, my hero! [*Lifting him out of the arm-chair.*] Buckle on your armour! Sally forth! Once more unto the breach!

[With some difficulty he raises LUCAS out of the chair.]

Lucas. Well, I'll go and have a look at the weather. [*Goes sulkily up to door.*] Mind you, if you turn me out I won't be responsible if there's a flare-up——

Dolly. Very well, so long as we don't have a flare-up here. Oh! [*Rings the bell again.*]

Lucas. [*Goes off, sulky, muttering.*] Of all the—turning me out—beastly infernal nuisance!

[Exit grumbling.]

Dolly. It would serve them both right if there was to be a flare-up—only I'm sure she'd drag me into it somehow. [*CRIDDLE appears at door.*] Please send and ask them at the Red Lion to saddle Captain Wentworth's horse and send it here at once.

Criddle. Yes, ma'am. *[Exit.]*

Dolly. Lucas is going to behave as badly over this as he did over the governess. Dad——!

Matt. Well?

Dolly. Of course, Lucas is in the army, but surely he—he isn't a fair sample?

Matt. Oh no, oh no! Lucas is very exceptional—quite exceptional.

Dolly. I thought so! They can't all be——

Matt. Oh no! I'm glad to say——

Dolly. I'm determined he shall go to-night.

LUCAS *re-enters.*

Lucas. I say, Dolly, I wish you'd come and look at the weather.

Dolly. What for?

Lucas. There's a great black cloud—it's going to come down!

Dolly. [*Enraged.*] I don't care if the heavens come down! You're going back to Aldershot to-night.

Lucas. But I tell you——[*Appeals to MATT.*] It's simply impossible for me to ride across that heath——

Matt. But you rode across it last night in a howling snowstorm——

Lucas. Yes, I did! Last night! And never again, thank you! No! I don't mind shaking down anywhere to oblige——

[*He is about to drop again into the arm-chair, but MATT gently pushes him aside and drops into the chair himself.*]

Lucas. [*Going to sofa.*] Anywhere to oblige!

[*Drops comfortably on to sofa.*]

Dolly. [*Comes up to him finally.*] Lucas, this is abominable! I suppose you think because we treated you so leniently over that wretched governess——

Lucas. Well, I thought you were pretty deuced hard down on us——

Dolly. What?! Oh! [*Appeals to MATT.*]

Lucas. I didn't mind your slanging me, but you might have had a little consideration for her feelings, because, after all, she was one of your own sex!

Dolly. My own sex! The minx!

Lucas. And an orphan!

Dolly. Orphan! [*To MATT.*] Go and speak to him! Go and speak to him!

Matt. Come, Lu. You're not playing the game! You promised to take yourself off.

Lucas. [*Comfortably seated.*] Well, I will take myself off, only let me take myself off in my own way.

Dolly. It's useless your staying! Renie won't see you again.

Lucas. Won't she?

Dolly. No. She gave me a last message for you——

Lucas. Did she? Why didn't you give it to me?

Dolly. If I tell you, will you take yourself off?

Lucas. Yes, of course. What was her last message?

Dolly. She said "She should always value your noble devotion, and be proud that she had known you; but you must see how hopeless it was, and that she trusted you would go away at once and leave her to respect you, as you had always respected her!"

Matt. A very pretty, touching little adieu! Does her great credit. Now, Lu! Cut it! Come, my boy!

[*Lifts him up off sofa.* LUCAS gets up very reluctantly.]

Lucas. Well, if I must go—good-night!

Matt. Good-night. [*Shaking hands.*] I may see you to-morrow afternoon.

Lucas. Where?

Matt. I'm driving over to Aldershot to see Sir John. I shall look you up——

Lucas. I may not be there in the afternoon——

Dolly. Lucas, you're coming over here——

Lucas. No—no; I'm not. You shouldn't suspect me like that.

Dolly. It won't be the least use your coming——

Lucas. I know that. Well, good-bye, Doll——

Dolly. Good-bye. [*Shaking hands.*]

Lucas. [*Is going up to door slowly and reluctantly, turns.*] I suppose if I were to give you my solemn promise I wouldn't see her, I couldn't shake down on that sofa.

Dolly. [*Sternly and decisively.*] No!

Lucas. [*Goes a few more steps towards door, turns.*]

I suppose I couldn't see Mrs. Sturgess? [DOLLY looks indignant.] Only to say good-bye.

Dolly. No! She was nearly undressed when I left her. She's asleep by now!

Enter RENIE fully dressed, looking very interesting and tearful. Throughout the scene she preserves the air of a martyr.

Dolly. [Indignantly.] Renie, you promised me you wouldn't come downstairs again!

Renie. Yes, dear, but I felt I couldn't rest under your father's unjust suspicions. [Goes to MATT, seizes his hand sympathetically.] Dolly tells me you have been watching the friendship that all unconsciously has sprung up between Captain Wentworth and myself——

Matt. [Uncomfortable.] Not exactly watching——

Renie. I feel you may have seen, or guessed something, that has given you a wrong impression.

Matt. No, no! I assure you——

Renie. If you have, I beg you to speak out and give us a chance of defending ourselves. Tell us exactly what you have seen, and what you suspect——

Matt. My dear Mrs. Sturgess, I haven't seen anything, and I don't suspect anything.

Renie. You really mean that?

Matt. Yes—yes——

Renie. [Clasping his hand eagerly.] Thank you so much. Friendship between a man and a woman is so misunderstood.

Matt. It is.

Dolly. Yes, Lucas had a friendship with a governess here which we all misunderstood—till afterwards.

Lucas. I say, Dolly, don't you——

Renie. Now that there is no chance of your misjudging our friendship, I don't mind saying——[Shows signs of breaking down.] You won't misunderstand me?

[Clinging to his hand.]

Matt. No, no!

Renie. My life has not been altogether a happy one.

Matt. I'm sure it hasn't!

Renie. Under other circumstances—let that pass! [*Wrings MATT'S hands.*] Thank you, thank you! Captain Wentworth, I shall always be proud to have known you.

Dolly. I've told him all that!

[*MATT hushes DOLLY with a gesture.*]

Renie. I shall always cherish the memory of our friendship, but it might be misunderstood, and so [*breaking down, but bearing up with an effort*], you will behave like the gallant gentleman I know you to be, and say good-bye to me for ever!

Matt. Nobly spoken! Very nobly spoken indeed!

Lucas. Well, if you insist——

Renie. I do! Good-bye for ever!

Lucas. Good-bye. [*They have a long hand-shake.*]

Renie. Good-bye.

[*Tears herself away from him and tragically throws herself on sofa. LUCAS follows her up.*]

Lucas. I say, Mrs. Sturgess——

Renie. [*Moans.*] Go, go! In pity's name don't make it harder for me!

Matt. In pity's name don't make it harder for her.

Dolly. [*Looking off at door.*] They'll be coming out of the billiard-room directly.

Matt. Now, Lucas——

CRIDDLE appears at door.

Criddle. Your horse is waiting for you, sir.

Lucas. My horse?!

Criddle. Yes, sir, just outside.

Lucas. What on earth do they mean? A valuable horse like that—standing about on a night like this—who told them?

Dolly. I did. The horse is waiting to take you back to Aldershot.

Lucas. I can't go back to Aldershot in this kit. [*Pointing to his dress-clothes.*] Tell them to take it back to the Red Lion!

Dolly. And Criddle, give the man Captain Wentworth's portmanteau to take to the Red Lion at the same time; and send Peters to me at once.

Criddle. Yes, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

Lucas. [*Grumbling.*] Well, of all——Good-bye Mrs. Sturgess.

Dolly. You've said good-bye——

Renie. [*Still tragic on sofa.*] Farewell—for ever!

Lucas. Good-night, Dolly!

Dolly. Farewell—for a good long time.

[*Shaking hands.*]

Lucas. Good-night, Uncle.

Matt. Good-night, Lucas. [*Shaking hands.*]

Lucas. [*Turns at door.*] Happen to have your cigar-case handy? [*MATT takes out cigar-case, offers it.*]

Lucas. Could you spare two?

Matt. Certainly!

Lucas. I've got a jolly long ride, I'll take three if you don't mind.

Matt. Do!

Lucas. Thank'ee. Well, good-night, everybody.

[*MATT gets LUCAS off, closes door after him.*]

Renie. [*Rouses herself from sofa.*] Has he gone? Is it all over?

Dolly. I hope so.

Renie. [*Goes to MATT impulsively—and seizes his hand.*] At least this bitter experience has gained me one true friend.

Matt. [*Embarrassed.*] Yes——

Renie. [*Wrings his hand in gratitude.*] Thank you so much——

[*He gets away from her and shows relief; takes out cigar and prepares to light it.*]

Renie. [*Standing in the middle of the room pitying*]

herself.] That's where we get the worst of it, we women who have hearts! We must feel, we must show our feelings, and then we get trampled down in the fight. Oh, Dolly, how I envy you your nature!

Dolly. [*Very chilly.*] Are you going into the spare room, dear?

Renie. Anywhere! Anywhere! Yes, the spare room!

PETERS *appears at door.*

Dolly. Peters, will you bank up the fire in the spare room and make everything comfortable for Mrs. Sturgess?

Peters. Yes, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

Renie. [*Still in the middle of the room, pitying herself.*] So my poor little tragedy is ended!

[*To MATT.*]

Matt. Yes. Well, let's be thankful no bones are broken!

Renie. No bones, but how about hearts? Well, I must bear it. [*With a weary smile.*] Mustn't I?

Matt. I'm afraid you must.

Renie. Good-night! [*Wrings his hand with gratitude.*] Good-night!

Matt. Good-night.

[*Gets away from her, and busies himself with his cigar, lights it.*]

Renie. Good-night, Dolly!

Dolly. I'll come up with you, and stay till you're quite comfortable.

Renie. Shall I ever be comfortable again? Will things ever be the same? I wonder!

[*Goes off mournfully and tragically with a prolonged sigh. MATT creeps up and closes door.*]

Dolly. [*Calls his attention to RENIE'S exit and makes a furious gesture after her.*] I know she'll be here next Christmas! [*Marches down enraged to MATT and repeats in an angry, aggrieved way, emphasizing each*

word.] I know that woman will be here next Christmas!

Matt. [*Seated comfortably with his cigar and paper.*]
I daresay she will——

[*DOLLY marches indignantly and decisively to door and exit.*

CURTAIN.



(Half an hour passes between Acts II and III.)

ACT III.

SCENE: *The same. Discover MATT in the same seat and attitude, with paper and cigar. DOLLY enters.*

Matt.



ELL??

Dolly. I've had an awful time with her——

Matt. How?

Dolly. First she had another fit of hysterics—then she longed to go out into the night air to cool her fevered brow—then she moaned out something about her noble Lucas——

Matt. And now?

Dolly. I've persuaded her to let Peters undress her. I've got her off my hands at last.

Matt. That's a comfort.

Dolly. Dad!

Matt. Yes.

Dolly. I won't have her here next Christmas.

Matt. No, I wouldn't.

Dolly. [*Repeats in a slow, aggrieved, enraged way, emphasizing each syllable.*] Whatever happens, I will not have that woman in my house next Christmas. You hear that?

Matt. Yes. You won't have her here next Christmas!

Dolly. I mean it, this time. And I won't have Lucas here again for a very long time.

Matt. I wouldn't.

Dolly. Dad, please put away that paper. You're going over to Aldershot to-morrow to try to get Lucas exchanged?

Matt. I'll try.

PETERS *appears at door.*

Dolly. Well, Peters, have you made Mrs. Sturgess comfortable?

Peters. I'm trying to, ma'am.

Dolly. Is she in bed yet?

Peters. No, ma'am.

Dolly. Not in bed!

Peters. No, ma'am, but she seems rather quieter.

Dolly. She let you undress her, I suppose?

Peters. I'm just going to, ma'am. She says her brain is still throbbing.

Dolly. Throbbing!

Peters. And could you lend her your hop-pillow?

Dolly. You'll find it in my wardrobe.

Peters. Yes, ma'am.

Dolly. Peters, pat up the hop-pillow for her, and insist on undressing her——

Peters. Yes, ma'am.

Dolly. Don't leave her till you've seen her comfortably in bed.

Peters. No, ma'am.

[*Exit. A gust of wind and a little rattle of hail on the conservatory window.*]

Matt. Whew! The New Year means business!

Dolly. And so do I, as Lucas will find out.

Matt. He is finding it out, on that heath!

Dolly. Yes! [*With a little laugh.*] Ha! ha! [*A louder gust and rattle of hail.*] Listen! Listen! Ha!

And he might have been here playing a comfortable rubber by the fire—if he'd simply behaved himself!

Matt. If he'd "simply behaved" himself! What we all miss through not "simply behaving" ourselves.

[*Another gust.*

Dolly. [*Laughs.*] Ah! He's catching it! I shall insist on Renie driving out with me to-morrow afternoon.

Matt. Yes.

Dolly. Then she can't meet Lucas. That will be another sell for him—[*Another furious gust and rattle.*] Listen! Ha! ha! I wonder how far Lucas has got!

[*A noise of something being knocked over in the conservatory, which is lighted.*

Matt. [*Goes to the conservatory door, looks in; is startled.*] Hillo! hillo!

LUCAS *enters from the upper conservatory door in riding-clothes of first Act.*

Dolly. [*Enraged.*] Lucas! How dare you?!

Lucas. It's all right—don't make a fuss!

Dolly. [*Furious.*] Why aren't you on the way to Aldershot?

Lucas. I didn't like the look of the weather! I didn't like the look of it one little bit! So I got them to give me a shake-down at the Red Lion——

Dolly. [*Indignantly.*] Shake-down at the Red Lion!

Lucas. Yes, on their sofa! You needn't look so black! I asked you first, to let me have a shake-down here—on that sofa——

Dolly. But why have you come back here?

Lucas. Well, I must have dropped those cigars uncle ; Matt gave me. I put them carefully in my side pocket, and when I got down to the Red Lion, lo and behold, they weren't there!

Dolly. You could have got a cigar at the Red Lion——

Lucas. [*Turns to MATT for sympathy.*] I could have

got a cigar at the Red Lion! [*To Dolly.*] No, thank you! So I thought I'd just stroll up here in the hope——

Dolly. In the hope of seeing Mrs. Sturgess! But she's safely in bed this time, and there's no possible chance of your seeing her.

Lucas. In the hope of getting Harry to give me a decent smoke. Well, I came into the Hall and not wishing to rile you by my hated presence—I slipped into the conservatory——

Enter HARRY.

Harry. [*Surprised at the riding-clothes.*] Hillo, Lu, going back to Aldershot to-night?

Lucas. No, not unless the weather takes a turn. No, Dolly said that as the spare room was occupied, would I mind getting a shake-down at the Red Lion. So I did, and as I've got nothing to smoke, may I cadge a cigar?

Harry. Yes, old fellow. [*Taking out cigar-case.*

Dolly. [*Intercepting.*] You said I should take charge of your cigars, in case you should be tempted to smoke more than two a day——

Harry. By Jove, I forgot all about two a day—I've been smoking all day. Here, Lu! [*About to throw cigar-case to LUCAS.*] You'd better take the lot and keep me out of temptation!

Dolly. No! I'll take charge of that, please.

[*Takes the cigar-case, looks angrily at LUCAS, goes to writing-desk, puts it in.*

PETERS appears at door.

Peters. I beg pardon, ma'am, Mrs. Sturgess——

Dolly. What about her?

Peters. When I got back with the hop-pillow she wasn't there. I've looked all over the house, and I can't find her anywhere.

RENIE enters, fully dressed from conservatory, very languidly, with handkerchief and smelling-salts.
PETERS goes off.

Dolly. Renie!

[Looks at MATT, who is inclined to laugh, checks it, shrugs his shoulders and goes over to fire.

Renie. My head was racking, I had to rush out—I've been pacing up and down under the veranda, up and down, up and down, up and down—[DOLLY makes a little grimace of angry incredulity] it's a little easier now, so I'll take advantage of the lull, and try to get some sleep.

Dolly. Yes, I would.

Renie. Good-night, dear.

Dolly. [Severely.] Good-night once more.

Renie. Good-night, Mr. Telfer. [Offering hand.

Harry. Good-night, I'm awfully sorry——

Renie. [With her weary smile.] Oh, it's only a headache. I can bear it. Thank you for your sympathy. [Wringing his hand in fervent gratitude.] Good-night, Mr. Barron.

Matt. Good-night. I hope we sha'n't have any more little tragedies, eh?

Renie. [Very fervently.] I hope not, oh, I hope not! [To LUCAS very casually and distantly.] Good-night, Captain Wentworth.

Lucas. [Same tone.] Good-night, Mrs. Sturgess.

[Exit RENIE. PETERS is seen to join her in the hall. A little pause.

Lucas. Well, I'll be toddling back to the Red Lion. Good-night, Dolly. [DOLLY looks at him, furious, turns away. HARRY looks a little surprised.] Good-night, Harry.

Harry. Good-night, Lu. Seems a pity for you to

turn out on a night like this. Dolly, can't we give him a shake-down——?

Dolly. No!

[*HARRY shows surprise at her tone. A little pause of embarrassment.*]

Lucas. Good-night, Uncle Matt.

Matt. [*Comes up to him, in a low voice.*] Cut it, my dear lad. Cut it! That's understood?

Lucas. Yes, of course. Well, good-night, Dolly, once more. [*She doesn't reply.*] Oh well, if you're going on the rampage—[*Goes off muttering.*] Infernal nuisance—night like this—— [Exit.

Harry. Is anything the matter?

Dolly. Lucas has offended me very much. I don't wish to speak of it.

The PROFESSOR enters at back.

Matt. Well, who was the victor?

Harry. The Professor won all four games.

Prof. I ascribe the increased accuracy of my stroke at billiards to my increased nerve force, now I have made Pableine my staple article of diet in place of meat.

Matt. Flies to the gray matter, eh?

Prof. Instantaneously.

Matt. Good stuff!

Prof. I hope you'll try it. Shall I send a tin to your room?

Matt. Will you? That will be kind!

CRIDDLE appears at door.

Criddle. I've put the spirits in the hall, sir.

Harry. You can take them away, Criddle. In the future we sha'n't require spirits at night, only soda water and tea.

Criddle. Yes, sir.

[Exit

Dolly. [*Who has been sitting wearily on sofa, rises.*] Well, I'm going to bed.

Harry. You forget, dear.

Dolly. What? [*HARRY taps the writing-desk.*] Oh, my dear Harry, we won't go into them to-night.

Harry. Yes, my dear, if you please. [*Very firmly. DOLLY makes an impatient gesture and pouts.*] Please don't look like that. If I'm to help you in paying off these bills, it must be to-night, or not at all.

Dolly. Oh, very well, but—— [*Sits down wearily.*

Prof. [*Taking out watch.*] Five minutes past my usual hour.

Dolly. Renie has one of her bad headaches, so I've put her in the spare room.

Prof. Thank you. I'm afraid she's a little wilful. I can never get her to see that life can yield us no real satisfaction unless we regulate all our actions to the most minute point. Good-night.

Dolly. Good-night! [*Shaking hands.*

Prof. Good-night, Telfer.

Harry. Good-night. [*Shaking hands*

Matt. Good-night, Harry.

Harry. Good-night, Dad. [*Shaking hands.*

Matt. [*To DOLLY.*] Night-night, dear.

Dolly. Night-night, dad. [*Kissing him.*

Prof. [*Has been waiting at door.*] I might perhaps show you the precise way of mixing the Pableine.

Matt. If you don't mind! What's the dose?

Prof. Two teaspoonfuls. On certain occasions I have taken as much as four tablespoonfuls.

Matt. Wasn't that rather—going it?

Prof. No. It's quite tasteless, except for a very slight beany flavour.

Matt. Sounds just the thing for a New Year's drink, to brace up good resolutions. Come along! I'll have a regular night-cap of it. [*Exeunt MATT and PROFESSOR.*

Harry. Now we can have our cosy half hour.

Dolly. Ye-es. I've had an awful evening with Lucas. Don't you think——?

Harry. No, my darling. You put it off after tea——

Dolly. But our heads will be so much clearer in the morning——

Harry. [*Very solemnly and severely.*] My darling, remember what Pilcher said about procrastination. And remember our resolutions last night. If we break them on the first night of the year, where shall we be on the thirty-first of December?

Dolly. I'm horribly fagged.

Harry. Conquer it! Think how delightful it will be to put your head on the pillow to-night, without a single anxiety, without a single thought——

Dolly. Except my gratitude to you!

Harry. Come, dear, no time like the present!

Dolly. [*Jumps up very briskly.*] No time like the present! [*Looking at him with great admiration.*] Oh, Harry, what a dear, kind, good husband you've always been to me!

Harry. Have I, my darling? [*Modestly.*] I've done my best——

Dolly. How I must have tried you!

Harry. No, dear—at least a little sometimes.

Dolly. When I think what patience you've had with me, and never reproached me——

Harry. Well, not often. We've had our little tiffs—That day at Goodwood—eh?

Dolly. Don't speak of it! I was to blame——

Harry. No, dear, I can't let you accuse yourself. I was quite in the wrong.

Dolly. No, dear, it was my fault entirely!

Harry. Well, we won't quarrel about that. Now these bills——

Dolly. And what good pals we've been!

Harry. And always shall be. [*Kissing her.*]

Dolly. [*Hugging him.*] Oh, you dear!

Harry. Now, business, business!

Dolly. [*Going up to writing-desk.*] What a lucky woman I am!

Harry. [*Seated at table.*] Bring them all.

Dolly. [*Has opened desk and taken up some bills—she looks round dubiously at HARRY.*] What a splendid thing it must be to be a husband and have it in your power to make your wife *adore* you, by simply paying a few bills.

Harry. Yes—bring them all. [*She comes down with a bundle of about fifteen, hands them to him.*] Is this all?

Dolly. All, of any importance.

Harry. I want to see them all.

Dolly. So you shall, but we'll go through these first, because [*lamely*] if you want to ask any questions we can settle them on the spot, can't we?

Harry. [*Reading from the bill.*] Maison Récamier, Court and artistic millinery. By Jove! [*Looks up.*]

Dolly. What!

Harry. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—nine hats!

Dolly. Different kinds of hats.

Harry. Yedda straw four guineas, ostrich feather ruffle, twelve pounds ten——

Dolly. That was the one—you remember—when I came into the room you said, "Stay there! Just as you are! I must kiss you!"

Harry. Yes, but twelve pounds ten—Moss green chip hat, four, fourteen, six. Heliotrope velvet toque——

Dolly. That's the dear little toque you admire so much!

Harry. Do I? Six guineas! Dear little toque! Hat in white Tegal with plumes of Nattier Bleu—fifteen guineas—Fifteen guineas?!

Dolly. With plumes! Of Nattier Bleu!

Harry. But fifteen guineas!

Dolly. Oh, the woman's a fearful swindler! But what are you to do with such people?

Harry. [*With bill.*] Total, sixty-four, seven, six. And I get my one silk topper a year, at a guinea, and three and six for doing it up. Total for me, one, four, six. Total for you——

Dolly. My dear Harry, don't make absurd comparisons!

Harry. [*Takes another bill.*] John Spearman, artistic gown maker, ball gowns, reception gowns, race gowns—Good heavens!

Dolly. What's the matter?

Harry. Total, five hundred and fifty-six pounds—that can't be right!

Dolly. [*Frightened.*] No, it can't be! Add it up!

Harry. [*Reading.*] Tea gown of chiffon taffeta——

Dolly. The one I took to Folkestone, you remember? [*With a little attempt at a kiss.*

Harry. [*Gently repulsing her.*] No, I don't. [*She puts her arms round his neck; he gently pushes her aside.*] Business first, please. [*Reads.*] Gown of white cloth with Postillion coat of Rose du Barri silk, motifs of silver, forty-five guineas——

Dolly. You won't grumble at that, for when I first put it on, you stood and looked at me and said, "I want to know how it is, Doll, that the moment a dress gets on to your shoulders, it seems to brisk up, and be as cocky and proud of itself——"

[*Again attempting to embrace him.*

Harry. [*Again repulsing her.*] Yes, well now I do know! Jolly proud and cocky your dresses ought to feel at this price! [*Reads.*] "Evening cloak of strawberry satin charmeuse, trimmed silk passementerie, motifs and fringed stoles of dull gold embroidery, thirty-five guineas." What's a motif?

Dolly. It's a trimming—a lot of little touches—a sort of—a—a—a—[*making a little descriptive gesture*] a suggestion—a motif——

Harry. And Mr. John Spearman's motif is that I should pay him five hundred and fifty-six pounds Well, I don't like Mr. John Spearman's motifs, and I'm not going to fall in with them. [*Puts the bill on the table rather angrily, takes up another, reads.*] "Artistic lingerie!" I wonder why all these people

call themselves artists! "Underwear of daintiness and distinction."

Dolly. Well, you've always praised——

Harry. Yes. In future, I'm going to be very careful what articles of your dress I praise. "Three pairs of blue silk garters, forty-five shillings." [*She has settled herself in the armchair, looking a little sulky and obstinate, leaning back and pettishly swinging one leg over the other.*] What have you got to say to that?

Dolly. Garters are necessary.

Harry. Yes, but why three? And why blue silk? Why don't you speak?

Dolly. The garters can speak for themselves!

Harry. Very well. Garters that can speak for themselves can pay for themselves! [*Dashes the bill on the table, takes up another. Reading.*] Three bottles cœur de Janette—three bottles Souffle de Marguerite—fifteen pounds for scent—and I have to smoke sixpenny cigars! And sometimes only fourpenny!

Dolly. Well, if you will smoke those horrid strong things you can't wonder I have to disinfect the house for you.

Harry. Disinfect the house *for* me! You'll very soon disinfect the house *of* me! [*Glances through the remaining bills, groans, puts them on the table, and walks about in despair. DOLLY rises and is going off.*] Where are you going?

Dolly. To bed.

Harry. [*Stopping her.*] No! Now we've begun, we'll go through to the bitter end, if you please. I want you to explain——

Dolly. My dear Harry, it will be quite useless for me to try to explain in your present state——

Harry. [*Getting furious.*] In my present state——

Dolly. Dancing about the room and shouting!——

Harry. I'm not shouting!

Dolly. You're not shouting?!

Harry. No, and if I am, isn't it enough to make a man shout when his wife——

MATT *appears at the door in his dressing-gown and slippers.*

Matt. Excuse my interrupting. But you know my room is just above this, and if you could manage to pitch your voices in rather a softer key——

Harry. By Jove, I'd forgotten! We were getting a little noisy. I'm awfully sorry.

Matt. Don't mention it! The Professor gave me rather a stiff go of his Pableine, and I fancy it hasn't agreed with me [*tapping his chest*] for I can't get a wink of sleep. Is there a spoonful of whiskey about?

Harry. On the sideboard in the dining-room.

Matt. Thankee. [*Tapping his chest.*] Harry, when you get over fifty, don't change your nightcap, or any of your other bad habits.

Harry. I won't. Now, Dolly——

Matt. [*Anxiously.*] You won't perhaps be very long now?

Dolly. No, we'd nearly finished——

Matt. Nothing serious, I hope?

Dolly. Harry doesn't approve of my using scent.

Harry. Not in pailfuls. Certainly not.

Dolly. I had three small bottles——

Matt. Montaigne says that the sweetest perfume a woman can have, is to have none at all. [*Exit.*]

Harry. Now, my darling, we shall best arrive at an understanding if we avoid all temper, and discuss it in a calm, business-like way.

Dolly. [*A little frightened.*] Ye-es——

Harry. Very well then, come and sit down and let us go into it, figure by figure, item by item, and see how we stand.

Dolly. Ye-es. Harry, you aren't going to be as business-like as all that?

Harry. As all what?

Dolly. I can't discuss it while you keep me at a distance! [*Suddenly rushes at him, seats herself on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, kisses him.*] There! now I feel I can discuss it thoroughly.

Harry. Very well [*kisses her*], so long as we do discuss it thoroughly.

Dolly. I began to get quite frightened of you, Mr. Jobling.

Harry. Jobling?

Dolly. The man Mr. Pilcher had to get a money-box for, because he swore at his wife!

Harry. Oh, yes.

Dolly. You got so angry—and shouted——

Harry. Well, there was no reason for that, especially as getting out of temper is *the* one thing I'm quite resolved to conquer this New Year——

Dolly. [*Kissing him.*] Don't forget that!

Harry. [*Kisses her.*] Now, business, business! [*Takes up a bill.*] What have we here? Carchet, gantier et bonnetier, artiste—Hillo, here's another artist! In stockings this time. [*Suddenly.*] I say!

Dolly. [*Frightened.*] Eh?

Harry. [*Points to an item in bill.*] Come now, Dolly—this is really too bad—this really is too bad!

Dolly. [*Frightened.*] What?!

Harry. One dozen pairs best silk hose, with clocks——

Dolly. Yes—how much does that come to?

Harry. Eleven pounds two——

Dolly. It does seem rather a high price, but——

[*Drawing up her dress and showing an inch or two of silk stocking.*]

Harry. You're wearing them about the house?

Dolly. I can't go about the house without stockings. And I put them on for your especial benefit. [*He utters a contemptuous exclamation.*] They're a lovely quality——

[*Drawing up her dress an inch or two higher.*]

Harry. I daresay. [*Turning away.*] I'm not going to admire your stockings, or your ostrich ruffles, or your blue silk garters, or your motifs, or anything that is yours! It's too expensive!

Dolly. [*Dress an inch higher, looking down at her stockings.*] It's the clocks you have to pay for——

Harry. I beg your pardon, it's the clocks I haven't got to pay for! And don't mean to—if I can help it. Idiotic thing to go and put clocks on stockings—[*muttering*] damned silly idiotic——

Dolly. Ah! [*Goes to table, brings the hospital box and puts it in front of him.*] Double fine this time.

Harry. What for?

Dolly. Naughty swear word, and getting out of temper.

Harry. Oh well—[*fumbling in his pocket*] I did say d——, but I didn't get out of temper!

Dolly. You didn't get out of temper?!?

Harry. Not at all. I'm quite calm. [*Sulkily puts a shilling in the box.*] There! [*Sits himself at table.*] Now we'll go quietly and methodically through the remainder——[*Taking up a bill, looks at it, exclaims*] Good heavens!

Dolly. Good heavens what?

Harry. [*In a low exhausted tone with groans.*] Good heavens! Good heavens! It's absolutely useless—Good heavens!

Dolly. But what is it? [*Coming up, looking over.*

Harry. [*Points to bill.*] Four more hats! Nine on the other bill—four more here. Thirteen hats.

Dolly. No, one was a toque.

Harry. But can you explain?

Dolly. Yes. You said yourself that Madame Récamier was horribly expensive, so I left her and went to Jacquelin's—just to save your pocket——

Harry. Never save my pocket again, please.

Dolly. Very well, I won't.

Harry. No, I daresay you won't, but I shall! I shall draw the strings very tightly in future. Save

my pocket! [*He is walking about distractedly.*] Save my pocket. [Groans.]

Dolly. Now, Harry, it's useless to take it in this way—you knew when you married me I hadn't got the money sense——

Harry. [Groans.] I hadn't got any sense at all!

Dolly. Very likely not. But try and have a little now. What have I done? Run a little into debt, solely to please you.

Harry. Yes; well, now run out of it, and I shall be better pleased still.

Dolly. After all, running into debt is a positive virtue beside the things that some wives do!

Harry. Oh, it's a positive virtue, is it?

Dolly. A husband is very lucky when his wife spends most of her time running up a few bills. It keeps her out of mischief. I'm sure you ought to feel very glad that I'm a little extravagant!

Harry. Oh, I am! I am! I'm delighted!

[*He sits at table, takes out a pencil, hurriedly puts down the amounts of the various bills—she creeps up behind him.*]

Dolly. What are you doing?

Harry. I'm totting up to see how lucky I am! Forty-one, one, six——[Groans.] Ninety-four——

[Groans.]

Dolly. [*Has crept up behind him, puts her arms round his neck.*] Now, Harry, will you take my advice——?

Harry. No.

Dolly. It's past eleven.

[*Trying to take the pencil out of his hand.*]

Harry. [*Disengaging her arms, speaking very sternly.*] Will you have the goodness to let me have all your bills, so that I may know what help I shall need from my banker?

Dolly. Harry, you don't mean that? Oh, that's absurd with our income!

Harry. Will you have the goodness to do as I say, and at once, please? [*He is dotting down figures.*]

She stands still in the middle of the room.] Did you hear me?

[She bursts into tears. He turns round and shows symptoms of relenting towards her, but steels himself and turns to the bills. She bursts into renewed tears. He goes on figuring.]

Dolly. [Piteously.] Harry! Harry! [Goes up to him and plucks his sleeve.] Harry!

Harry. Well?

[He turns and looks at her, is about to yield, but resists, turns away from her, settles resolutely to his figures.]

Dolly. And on the first night of the New Year, too! Just as we were going to be so happy! Harry! [Holds out her arms appealingly.] Harry! [HARRY suddenly turns round and clasps her.] How could you be so unkind to me?

Harry. Was I? I didn't mean to be. Now! Dry your tears, and help me reckon this up——

Dolly. Ye-es.

Harry. But first of all let me have the remainder of the bills——

Dolly. Yes.

Harry. At once, my darling—it's getting late.

Dolly. Yes. [Goes up to desk.] You won't reproach me?

Harry. Of course I won't.

Dolly. I can bear anything except your reproaches. Promise you won't reproach me.

Harry. I won't, unless——

Dolly. Unless what?

Harry. It's something too awful.

Dolly. Oh, it isn't. Not at all. Not at all. [Goes up to the desk, brings down about ten more bills with great affected cheerfulness.] There! You see, it's nothing.

Harry. [Hastily looking at the totals.] Nothing? You call these nothing!!?

Dolly. Nothing to speak about—nothing awful!

Harry. Good heavens! How any woman with the least care for her husband, or her home——[*looking at one total after another*] how any woman with the least self-respect——[*DOLLY goes to him, puts her arms round him, tries to embrace—he repulses her.*] No, please. I've had enough of that old dodge.

Dolly. Dodge!

Harry. I remember that last two hundred pounds and how you sweedled me out of it!

Dolly. Sweedled?

Harry. Yes! Sweedled!

Dolly. There's no such word!

Harry. No, but there's the thing! As most husbands know. [*Referring to one bill after another, picking out items.*] Lace coat, hand-made! En-tout-cas, studded cabochons of lapis lazuli—studded cabochons—studded cabochons!

Dolly. [*Has quietly seated herself, and is looking at the ceiling.*] Couldn't you manage to pitch your voice in rather a softer key?

Harry. [*Comes angrily down to her, bills in hand, speaks in a whisper, very rapidly and fiercely.*] Yes! And I say that a woman who goes and runs up bills like these, [*dashing the back of one hand against the bills in the other*] while her husband is smoking three-penny cigars, will very soon bring herself and him to one of those new palatial workhouses where, thank heaven, the cuisine and appointments are now organized with a view of providing persons of your tastes with every luxury at the ratepayers' expense. [*Returns angrily to the bills, turns them over.*] Irish lace bolero! [*Turns to another.*] Fur motor coat, fifty-five guineas——

Dolly. [*Calmly gazing at the ceiling.*] You told me to look as smart as Mrs. Colefield.

Harry. Not at that price! If I'd known what that motor tour would cost by Jove! I'd——

Dolly. You're getting noisy again. You'll wake my father.

Harry. He ought to be waked! He ought to know what his daughter is saddling me with.

Dolly. Very well, if you don't care how shabby I look——

Harry. Shabby! [*Referring to bills.*] Lace demi-toilette! Point de Venise lace Directoire coat! Shabby?

Dolly. My dear Harry, do you suppose we shall ever agree as to what constitutes shabbiness?

Harry. No, I'm hanged if we ever shall!

Dolly. Then suppose we drop the subject. For the future I shall endeavour to please you entirely.

Harry. Oh, you will?

Dolly. By dressing so that you'll be ashamed to be seen in the same street with me. I shall make myself a perfect fright—a perfect dowdy—a perfect draggletail!

Harry. Then I shall not be seen in the same street with you.

Dolly. You won't?

Harry. No, my dear. Make no mistake about that!

Dolly. You'll be seen with somebody else, perhaps?

Harry. Very likely.

Dolly. Have you met Miss Smithson again?

Harry. Not since the last time.

Dolly. Have you seen her since we were at Folkestone?

Harry. What's that to do with your bills?

Dolly. A great deal. That night at dinner she told you her dress allowance was a hundred and twenty a year, and you said you wished she'd give me a few lessons in economy.

Harry. I did not.

Dolly. Pardon me, you did!

Harry. Pardon me, I did not. I said she might give *some* women a lesson in economy.

Dolly. You did not! I heard every word of your

conversation, and you distinctly asked her to give me, your wife, a few lessons in economy.

Harry. I'll swear I didn't!

Dolly. Ask my father! He was there.

Harry. Very well! I'll ask him the first thing in the morning.

Dolly. No, to-night! You've accused me of deliberately saying what isn't true, and I——

Harry. I have not!

Dolly. Yes, you have. And I insist on having it cleared up to-night! I don't suppose he's asleep! Fetch him down!

Harry. Very well! I will fetch him down! [*Exit.*

Dolly. [*Paces furiously up and down.*] Me! Lessons in economy! Lessons in economy! Me! Lessons in economy! And from Miss Smithson! From that creature! Lessons in economy!

Re-enter HARRY.

Harry. He'll be down in a minute! Meantime, [*very angry*] I want to know what any woman in this world wants with two dozen cache corsets?

[*Banging his free hand on the bills.*

Dolly. We'll clear up Miss Smithson first——

Harry. No, we will not clear up Miss Smithson——

Dolly. Because you can't clear up Miss Smithson——

Harry. I can clear up Miss Smithson——

Dolly. You cannot clear up Miss Smithson——

MATT appears at door in dressing-gown, rubbing his eyes and looking very sleepy.

Dad, you remember Miss Smithson——

Matt. [*Coming in, very sleepy.*] Smithson?

Dolly. The girl at the hotel at Folkestone, that Harry paid so much attention to.

Harry. I paid no more attention to Miss Smithson than was absolutely necessary. Did I, Mr. Barron?

Dolly. Oh! Oh! Dad, you remember——

Matt. Not for the moment——

Dolly. Not the disgraceful way Harry—there's no other word—carried on!

Harry. I did not carry on—Mr. Barron, I appeal to you.

Dolly. Dad!

Matt. My dear, I certainly did not notice——

Dolly. No, he was far too careful to let anyone notice it, except his own wife!

Harry. You lay your life when I do carry on my wife will be the last person I shall allow to notice it!

Dolly. I daresay! Dad, did you hear that?

Matt. Yes. [*Rousing himself a little.*] Now, Harry, what about this Miss Smithson?

Harry. That's what I want to know!

Matt. Who is Miss Smithson?

Dolly. Surely you remember that lanky girl——

Harry. Miss Smithson is not lanky——

Dolly. Not lanky? Not lanky!? You can't have any eyes——!

Harry. That's what I've often thought——

Dolly. [*Explodes.*] Oh! Oh! Dad!

Matt. Come, Harry, let's clear this up. [*Suddenly.*] Smithson? Oh yes! The girl who sat on your left at your dinner party——

Dolly. That's the one!

Matt. I should call her a trifle lanky, Harry.

Dolly. A trifle? Well, never mind! You remember that dinner party——

Matt. [*Cautiously.*] Ye-es.

Dolly. You remember how she waited for a lull in the talk, and then she said with that silly, simpering, appealing look——

Harry. Miss Smithson's look is not silly or simpering.

Dolly. Well, it's appealing, isn't it?

Harry. [*With a little chuckle.*] Oh, yes, it's appealing.

Dolly. [*Enraged.*] Oh! Dad!

Matt. [*Quiets her.*] Shush!—What did she say?

Dolly. She said with a very marked glance at me, "My dress allowance is a hundred and twenty a year, and I don't understand how any reasonable woman can wish for more!" What do you think of that?

Matt. Well, if she did say that, and if she glanced at you, it——

Dolly. Yes?

Matt. It wasn't very nice of her.

Dolly. Nice? It was an insult! A direct, intentional, abominable insult, wasn't it?

Matt. Yes, yes, decidedly, under the circumstances——

Dolly. And Harry ought to have resented it?

Matt. At his own dinner table he couldn't, could he?

Dolly. Yes! At least, if he couldn't resent it, he ought to have *shown* that he resented it. Instead of that, he actually asked her to give me a few lessons in economy!

Harry. I did not!

Dolly. Pardon me, you did! Me! his wife! Lessons in economy!

Harry. And a thundering good thing if she had given you a few before you ran up these bills!

[*Dashes his hand on to the bills.*]

Dolly. There! You hear?!

Matt. Come, Harry, you oughtn't to have asked another woman to give your wife lessons in economy.

Harry. I didn't!

Dolly. Dad! You were there——

Matt. Yes, but I don't quite remember——

Dolly. You don't remember?! Surely you can remember a simple thing like that when your own daughter tells you it was so!

Matt. Now, Harry, what did you really say to Miss Smithson?

Harry. I said she might give *some* women a lesson in economy.

Matt. Not meaning Dolly?

[*Giving him a wink to say "No."*]

Harry. No-o.

Dolly. Then whom did he mean? Lessons in economy? Whom *could* he mean if he didn't mean me?

Harry. Just so!

Dolly. Ah! There! You see, he owns it!

Matt. No, no, I'm sure he doesn't mean it! Did you, Harry? [Winking at HARRY.]

Dolly. Then will he please say what he really does mean?

Matt. Now, Harry, what do you really mean?

Harry. Well, you remember that night of the dinner party at Folkestone.

Matt. [*Cautiously.*] Ye-es——

Harry. After they'd all gone you and I went into the smoking-room, didn't we?

Matt. [*Cautiously.*] Ye-es.

Harry. And you said, "Doll's in one of her high gales again!"

Dolly. High gales?! [*Indignant.*] Father! You didn't say that?

Matt. No, no, my dear——

Harry. Excuse me, those were your exact words. High gales!

Matt. I don't remember.

Dolly. No, you don't remember anything.

Harry. You said, "What on earth was up between her and Miss Smithson at dinner?"

Dolly. You see! That proves exactly what I said!

Harry. No, by Jove, it proves that your father noticed what a confounded, cussed——

Dolly. Go on! Go on! Say it!

Matt. Shush! Shush! Well, Harry, what did you say?

Harry. Well, not wishing to give Dolly away——

Dolly. Ha! ha! Not wishing to give me away!

Harry. Not then! But, by Jove, if any decent chap were to come along now——

Dolly. [*Exploding.*] There! There! [*To MATT.*] And you sit there and hear my own husband insult me in my own house!

Matt. No! no!

Dolly. But there you sit! There you sit!

Matt. [*Jumps up fiercely.*] Now, Harry!

Harry. [*Fiercely.*] Well, now, Mr. Barron——

Dolly. Why don't you defend me? Why don't you demand an apology?

Matt. What for?

Dolly. For everything! For to-night! For that night at Folkestone!

Harry. That night at Folkestone! Why, your father was quite on my side——

Matt. What?

Dolly. He wasn't; were you, Dad?

Matt. No—no.

Harry. What? [*Fiercely.*] Do you remember exactly what passed between us in the smoking-room, Mr. Barron?

Matt. No.

Harry. Then I'll tell you——

Matt. [*Retreating towards door.*] No—no—I don't want to know——

Harry. [*Following him up, shouting a little.*] You said, "I know what she's like in her high gales! I remember what the little devil was like at home."

Dolly. [*Pursuing him up to door.*] Father! You didn't say that!

Matt. No—no, my darling—quite a mistake—quite a mistake—altogether a mistake.

[*Gets thankfully off at back*

Dolly. [*Calls after him.*] Then why don't you stay and tell him so!

Harry. [*Shouts after MATT.*] It's not a mistake!

Dolly. [*Calls after MATT.*] It's cowardly of you to leave me here to be insulted!

Harry. [*Goes up to door, shouts.*] It's not a mistake! You patted me on the back and said, "Poor chap! Poor chap!" You know you did! [*Closes the door, comes fiercely down to DOLLY.*] It's not a mistake! He could see you had insulted Miss Smithson.

Dolly. I had not insulted her! I was far too civil to her; considering that the next evening you took her out on the Leas, when you ought to have been at billiards——

Harry. I took her out on the Leas!

Dolly. Yes! You weren't in the billiard-room! So where were you? Where were you?

Harry. I jolly well don't know, and I—I——

Dolly. Say it! Say it!

Harry. I damned well don't care!

Dolly. Ah!

[She seizes the box, brings it up to him, puts it irritatingly in front of him; he seizes it, they struggle for it, trying to take it out of each other's hands; she screams, he tries to get it; there is a scuffle round the room; he tries to rub her knuckles, she makes a little feint to bite him; in the struggle the box drops on the floor a little below the table, right.]

Dolly. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

Harry. Now, for the last time, have I all your bills?

Dolly. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

Harry. Have I all your bills?

Dolly. Jobling! Jobling! Jobling!

Harry. Once more, madam, have I all your bills?

Dolly. No, you haven't!

Harry. Then please hand them over to me this instant, so that I may take proceedings.

Dolly. [*Laughing.*] Proceedings! Ha! Take your proceedings!

Harry. By Jove! I will take proceedings.

Dolly. Take them! Take them!

Harry. [*Walking about furiously with the bills.*] So this is the way the money goes! [*Banging the bills.*] While I have to smoke twopenny cigars! And can't get a decent dinner!

Dolly. You can't get a decent dinner?

Harry. No! Look at those messes last night. They weren't fit for a cook-shop.

Dolly. Oh! Oh! Oh! Get a housekeeper! Get a housekeeper!

Harry. By Jove! that's what I mean to do!

Dolly. Have Miss Smithson! Send for her to-morrow morning! I'll hand her over the keys!

Harry. [*Shouting.*] And please hand me over the rest of your bills! The rest of your bills!

[*DOLLY marches up to the desk.*]

MATT appears at door in dressing-gown.

Matt. I can't get a wink of sleep——

[*DOLLY takes out about twenty more bills.*]

Harry. I insist on seeing the whole lot! So there!

Dolly. [*Flourishing the bills, strewing them on the floor.*] Well there! And there! And there! And there! Now you've got the whole lot! And I hope you're satisfied! I'm going into Renie's room! [*Exit.*]

Harry. You're not going into Renie's room. I insist on your going through these bills——

[*Following her off. Their voices are heard retreating upstairs, DOLLY saying, "Go through the bills! Send for Miss Smithson! Have her here to-morrow morning! Take your proceedings." HARRY saying, "I insist on going through the bills to-night! Do you hear, madam, I insist! Will you come down and go through these bills," etc.*]

Matt. [*Sees the box on floor, picks it up, carefully places it on table.*] We're making a splendid start for the New Year! [*Exit.*

CURTAIN.



(A year passes between Acts III and IV)

ACT IV.

SCENE: *The same. The sofa now fronts the fireplace. The arm-chair is below the sofa, a little to its right. The other furniture remains the same.*

TIME: *Afternoon of January 1st, 1908.*

Enter LUCAS, followed by CRIDDLE. LUCAS has his left collar-bone broken, and his arm is strapped across his breast; his coat is buttoned loosely over the arm, the left sleeve hanging down.

Lucas.



HEY'VE gone to meet me?

Criddle. Yes, sir,

Lucas. By the road?

Criddle. Yes, sir.

Lucas. That's how I've missed them. My car broke down the other side of the clump, and so I walked over the fields.

Criddle. Yes, sir. I beg pardon, I hope the arm isn't serious.

Lucas. No, Criddle. Just serious enough to get me a couple of months' leave, so that I could spend the New Year in England.

Criddle. You had it very hot in India, I suppose, sir?

Lucas. Blazing!

Criddle. We've got the same old weather here, you see, sir.

Lucas. Same old weather! Had any visitors for Christmas, Criddle?

Criddle. Mr. Barron, of course, and Professor and Mrs. Sturgess.

Lucas. Same old visitors—same visitors, I should say. Mr. Pilcher still Vicar here, I suppose?

Criddle. Yes, sir. He gave us a wonderful sermon at the old year's service last night.

Lucas. Same old sermon!

Criddle. No, sir. Not exactly the same sermon, though it had similar points to last year. Ah! You came over for the old year's service last year?

Lucas. Yes, and a rattling good sermon it was!

Criddle. Very powerful and persuading, wasn't it, sir? It even touched me up a bit.

Lucas. In what way, Criddle?

Criddle. I used to have my ten bob on any horse as I fancied, but I never put a farthing on anything—not even on Sulky Susan for the Oaks.

Lucas. You didn't?

Criddle. No, and thank God, in a manner of speaking, that I didn't, for she never pulled it off. I owe that to Mr. Pilcher. No, I never touched a thing till the Leger. That reminds me——

Lucas. What, Criddle?

Criddle. Why, last year, after Mr. Pilcher's sermon, the master had a collecting box, and when he found himself going a bit off the straight he used to put in a shilling or half-a-crown for Mr. Pilcher's blanket fund——

Lucas. Yes, of course! And Uncle Matt promised him a sovereign for each of us if we had carried out our good resolutions. Is that coming off, Criddle?

Criddle. I expect it is, sir. Mr. Pilcher is coming here this afternoon, and the master told me to be sure and find the box before he gets here.

Lucas. Find the box?

Criddle. Nobody has seen anything of it for some months. Excuse me, sir, I must look for it.

[*Exit CRIDDLE.*]

LUCAS *takes out letter from an unsealed envelope, glances through it, sits at table, takes out pencil, adds a short note, puts letter in envelope, seals it up, puts it in his tail pocket, goes to conservatory, looks in. RENIE enters at door behind him. She starts, as he turns round.*

Renie. [*In a whisper.*] You're here already?

Lucas. Yes——

Renie. Your wound?

Lucas. Much better. Nearly well.

Renie. I'm so glad——

Lucas. I'm not. I shall have to cut it back to India directly. Why didn't you answer my last letter?

Renie. I did—and tore it up.

Lucas. Tore it up?

Renie. What's the use? I told you last year we could never be anything to each other!

Lucas. But you didn't mean it?

[*He seizes her hand and kisses it several times.*]

Renie. [*Feebly attempting to withdraw it.*] Yes—yes, I did. Hush!

Lucas. I want you to read this.

[*Shows her the letter.*]

Matt. [*Heard through the door which is open a few inches.*] Have you found the box, Criddle?

Criddle. No, sir. I've hunted everywhere.

Matt. Have another look. We must have it ready for Mr. Pilcher.

MATT enters. Meantime RENIE has crept to upper conservatory door and gone off signing to LUCAS to keep silence. He has taken the letter out of his pocket and held it up for her to see, putting it back before MATT enters.

Matt. Ah, Lucas. So you've got here. Happy New Year!

Lucas. Happy New Year, Uncle Matt.

[Cordially shaking hands.]

Matt. Glad to see you back in England.

Lucas. Glad to be back!

Matt. How's the arm?

Lucas. Splendid—nearly well. Dolly and Harry all right?

Matt. First rate. They'll be here directly.

Lucas. The Sturgesses are here again, Criddle tells me.

Matt. Ye-es.

Lucas. Gray matter still going strong?

Matt. Booming.

Lucas. How's Mrs. Sturgess?

Matt. As usual. Lucas——

Lucas. Well?

Matt. You're quite cured, eh?

Lucas. Cured?

Matt. Of your infatuation for her.

Lucas. Infatuation? Well, I admired her, and perhaps it was lucky I was ordered out to India——

Matt. I managed that for you, my boy.

Lucas. You did!?

Matt. Sir John wanted a smart A.D.C., so I drove over to Aldershot, cracked you up, and got you the job.

Lucas. So that was why I was packed off. It was you who——

Matt. Aren't you thankful I did?

Lucas. Yes, much obliged to you, much obliged!

Matt. So you ought to be. And so's the lady.

Lucas. Is she?

Matt. Yes. When we got your wire yesterday saying you'd motor down to-day, Dolly had a long talk with her, and the result was she thanked Dolly and me for getting you out of the way and saving her from you.

Lucas. Did she?

Matt. Yes, for twenty minutes. She kissed Dolly, and I think she would have kissed me, only I didn't feel myself quite worthy.

Lucas. Oh, so that's all settled!

Matt. That's all settled. At least, let's hope so.

Lucas. What do you mean?

Matt. Well, you won't come——

Lucas. What?

Matt. The same old game.

Lucas. What same old game?

Matt. Why, *the* same old game!

Lucas. You must be judging me by yourself, when you were young.

Matt. My dear boy, that's just what I am doing. Lucas, there's not going to be any repetition——

Lucas. No—no.

Matt. Because it isn't the right thing to do, is it?

Lucas. No.

Matt. Very well then, don't do it!

Lucas. I won't! [*Listening.*] Ah! [*DOLLY and HARRY'S voices heard in hall.*] Dolly and Harry!

DOLLY and HARRY enter very lovingly.

Lucas. Hillo, Doll, old girl! Happy New Year!

Dolly. Happy New Year, Lu!

Lucas. Harry, old brick, how goes it?

Harry. Splendid!

Lucas. Happy New Year!

Harry. Happy New Year! [*Looking lovingly at DOLLY.*] By Jove, Doll, you can foot it. [*To LUCAS.*]

Doll and I have just raced up from the farm. She licked me! bless her!

Dolly. Yes, because you encouraged me!

Harry. [*Looking at her lovingly and admiringly, kisses her heartily.*] There aren't many things this little woman can't do.

Dolly. When you encourage me!

Harry. Oh, I'll encourage you!

[*He again kisses her heartily.*]

Harry. Well, Lu, old boy, glad to see you home again. Arm pretty bad?

Lucas. No, nearly well, unfortunately.

Dolly. Down for the day?

Lucas. Well, now my car has broken down, I was wondering if you'd put me up——

Dolly. [*Firmly.*] No. We shall be pleased for you to stay dinner.

Harry. There's the spare room, Doll.

Dolly. [*Firmly.*] No. That may be wanted for Renie, or myself.

Harry. [*Half aside to her.*] I say, not for you, old girl!

Lucas. Oh, well, I shall have to get a shake-down at the Red Lion.

Enter RENIE at back, still in outdoor clothes.

Renie. [*Feigning a little surprise.*] Captain Wentworth! A happy New Year!

Lucas. Happy New Year, Mrs. Sturgess.

[*Shaking hands.*]

Renie. So sorry to hear of your wound!

Lucas. Oh, it's healed, thank you.

Renie. I'm so glad. Shall you be making a long stay in England?

Lucas. I fear only a few days longer.

Renie. I'm sorry your visit will be so short.

CRIDDLE *enters triumphantly with the hospital box, which is very mouldy and dusty—he has also duster in his hand.*

Criddle. I've found him, sir—

Matt. Rather mouldy, eh?

Criddle. Oh, we'll soon put that to rights, sir.

[Begins to dust the box carefully.]

Matt. Looks well for your household discipline here, Harry.

Harry. How?

Matt. You've had no occasion to use him lately.

Criddle. *[Displaying the box, having carefully dusted it.]* There he is, sir, Hospital for Incurables! Nearly as good as new.

Matt. Where did you find him?

Criddle. In the wine-cellar, of all places! I was getting out a bottle of the sixty-eight port for New Year's night, and happening to put my hand behind, there he was!

Harry. *[Has a sudden gesture of remembrance.]* Yes, I remember!

Matt. What should incurables be doing in the wine-cellar? *[Holds out his hand to CRIDDLE for the box. CRIDDLE, who has been holding it carefully, gives it to MATT. Exit CRIDDLE. MATT gives the box a shake. It rattles as if half full of coins. He shakes it again, more violently; it rattles again.]* Internal organs sound healthy. How did he get into the wine-cellar, Harry?

Harry. Well, Dolly and I had been having a little tiff one morning—nothing serious——

Matt. No. When was that?

Harry. March, wasn't it?

Dolly. May, I think——

Harry. No, it wasn't that one—Well, never mind, I got so riled at Dolly always poking this box in front of me whenever I happened to——so I thought the wine-cellar would be the safest place for it.

Matt. [*Gives it another rattle.*] Well, here he is, turned up just at the right moment! And here you all are, Dolly, Harry, Lucas, Mrs. Sturgess—all clamouring for me to redeem my promise and put in a sovereign for each of you.

CRIDDLE *appears at door announcing* MR. PILCHER.

PILCHER *enters with four oblong brown paper parcels of equal size.* Exit CRIDDLE.

Pilcher. Happy New Year to you all! Excuse me. [*Depositing his parcels.*] My New Year's gifts to a few of my parishioners!

Dolly. New Year's gifts!

Pilcher. To those who need them. [*Shaking hands with her.*] Happy New Year, Mr. Barron!

[*Shaking hands.*]

Matt. Happy New Year!

Pilcher. How do this morning, Telfer! [*HARRY nods.*] My dear Mrs. Sturgess! [*Shaking hands.*]

Renie. Happy New Year! What a lovely sermon you gave us again last night!

Pilcher. Lovely! Well, say healthy, bracing.

Harry. A jolly good rouser again. Made me feel—
well— [*Gives himself a shake.*]

Pilcher. Ah, Captain Wentworth, happy New Year!

Lucas. [*Shaking hands.*] Happy New Year!

Pilcher. I heard you were wounded—

Lucas. Oh, that's done with.

Matt. We were just talking about our New Year's inquest—

Pilcher. Inquest?!

Matt. Into the characters of Dolly and Harry and— [*Glancing at RENIE and LUCAS.*]

Dolly. Oh, please don't talk about inquests. Nobody's character is dead here.

Matt. I hope not! We shall see—

Lucas. Uncle, you don't really mean to carry out this ridiculous idea of yours?

Matt. It was a bona fide bargain on my side, but if you wish to avoid any awkward little exposures, or if Mr. Pilcher will kindly waive his claims to my contributions——

Pilcher. I'm afraid I can't. I've come here for the express purpose of bearing away my trophy—Ah! [*Seeing box, takes it, gives it a shake; his features assume a pleasant smile.*] It seems to have proved a very wholesome household regulator.

Harry. Yes, by Jove! It hadn't been in the house twenty-four hours before I put in a sovereign.

Pilcher. A sovereign?

Harry. The first night of last year Dolly and I had a little tiff—nothing serious—and so the next morning I made it up and—didn't I, Dolly?——

Dolly. You did! And paid my bills like a lamb, you dear!

Pilcher. And put in a sovereign? [*Rattles the box again.*] I won't say "Don't have any more household tiffs," but I will say "Don't omit to liquidate them."

PROFESSOR STURGESS *enters at back, with the proofs of his book in his hand.*

Prof. How do you do?

Pilcher. How do you do? [*Shaking hands.*] Happy New Year!

Prof. Happy New Year to you! [*To LUCAS.*] How d'ye do?

Lucas. First rate. Happy New Year!

[*Shaking hands.*]

Prof. Thank you. An accident?

Lucas. Bit of one. Getting over it.

Prof. If I might recommend the constant use of Pableine.

Lucas. Oh, thanks, it's quite well——

Prof. Try Pableine. It's a wonderful restorative.
[*Looking round.*]

Pilcher. We were just about to settle the question Mr. Barron raised last New Year's day——

Prof. Oh yes! I remember! Curiously enough I have only this morning received the proofs of my new volume, "Free Will, the Illusion."

[*Showing the proofs to PILCHER.*]

Pilcher. Very interesting. I should like to discuss the matter with you, but [*taking out watch*] I've so many New Year's calls to make. [*Looking at MATT.*] Perhaps we ought to get on with the—a——

Matt. Inquest.

Pilcher. Vindication.

Matt. [*Accepting the correction.*] Vindication.

Pilcher. Can you remember the exact terms.

Matt. I am to pay a sovereign for everyone of your hearers who has so far benefited by the wise admonitions of your last year's sermon as to have broken off his bad habits, or some especial bad habit——

Lucas. We aren't bound to say what the bad habit is that we've broken off?

Matt. I don't wish to be inquisitive, but if you don't mention the particular bad habit, you'll have to give me some assurance that you've conquered it. [*Putting down proofs on table, taking up the money-box, giving it a shake.*] Now, who'll be first to step into the confessional?
[*Looking round.*]

Dolly. I will, as I've nothing to confess.

Matt. Nothing?

Dolly. No. I had what some husbands might think a bad habit, but——

Harry. No bills this Christmas, eh, Doll?

Dolly. No.

Harry. You're sure now, my darling?

Dolly. Well, you must have some bills—they grow up before you know—you can't settle them all on

the spur of the moment, but I've nothing of importance. So please put in your sovereign for me.

Matt. Then you've absolutely broken off your bad habit of running up bills?

Dolly. Yes.

Matt. Entirely?

Dolly. Yes. You said you wouldn't be inquisitive.

Pilcher. Mrs. Telfer has given her word. I think I may claim one victory for free will, [*nodding victoriously at the PROFESSOR who shakes his head*], and one sovereign for the Blanket Club.

Matt. Hum! [*Draws a sovereign out of his pocket and very reluctantly drops it into the box, shakes his head at DOLLY who looks a little uncomfortable.*] Who volunteers next? Harry?

Harry. Oh well, here goes! I'm going to make a clean breast. The fact is I've made a thundering mess of it.

Matt. Ah!

Harry. I did begin all right except for a little tiff with Dolly—and then I kept on pretty well for some time, and then—well I don't know—I seemed to go all to pieces and—[*MATT rattles the money-box.*] However, better luck this year! But it's so jolly hard to keep it up. And I'd got pretty slack till you woke us up last night—I say, that was a rouser again!

Pilcher. It wasn't a very bad sermon, was it?

Matt. No victory for free will and the Blanket Club, this time. Game and game. Now which of you two—

[*Looking at RENIE and LUCAS.*]

Renie. I'll be your first victim. [*Coming into the middle of the room, and posing.*] It's so strange that what you started as a jest—

Matt. Oh no, in deadly earnest I assure you.

Renie. In this life who knows what is jest and what is earnest? The least little innocent thing may turn to a tragedy—

Matt. Surely you haven't had any little tragedies?

Renie. No, last year a mere little circumstance

might have turned to a tragedy—honestly I wasn't to blame, but perhaps I was a little careless, and two dear friends came to me with their counsel, and what might have been a tragedy was turned to a comedy.

Prof. My dear, may I ask what "circumstance" you are alluding to?

Matt. We said we wouldn't be inquisitive——

Prof. No, but I cannot recall anything in my wife's life during the last twelve months that even approached a tragedy——

Renie. I said the affair was quite unimportant——

Prof. Then I wish, my dear, you wouldn't magnify everything, and I wish you would read solid scientific works in place of rubbishy French novels.

Matt. Meantime, [*to RENIE*] may we be confident your little tragedy is ended——

Renie. Oh yes, quite.

Pilcher. Another victory.

Matt. [*Looks searchingly at her, drops a sovereign in the box.*] Lucas?

Lucas. [*Coming cheerfully forward.*] My turn for the thumbscrew!

Matt. You seem very cheerful about it.

Lucas. Yes, I'm going to make a jolly good show.

Matt. What particular bad habit have you conquered during the past year?

Lucas. I don't know that I've conquered any one in particular, but I've had a regular good go in all round, so altogether I can pat myself on the back.

Matt. But I want to know one particular habit conquered—for instance, you weren't very careful what ladies you made love to, or how many of them at the same time——

Lucas. I say, Uncle Matt, drop this——

Matt. And a year or two ago you went just a little bit off the straight——

Lucas. Oh no I didn't.

Matt. I want to know——

Lucas. Thank you, no more thumbscrew. I'm out of this before it goes any further.

Matt. It isn't going any further. [*Putting his hand on LUCAS'S shoulder.*] Give me your word.

Lucas. It wasn't a very bad case, and—I summoned all my resolution, and there the matter ended.

Pilcher. I think I may claim a victory here.

Lucas. So please put in your sovereign.

Matt. [*Very seriously.*] Then I may take it, Lu, you've really broken off?

Lucas. Yes, yes, of course I have.

[*MATT puts in a sovereign, hands the box to PILCHER.*]

Pilcher. Three victories and one draw out of four. Most satisfactory. [*Taking out watch.*] I must hurry off to the White House. [*Rattling the box.*] Excellent results! So excellent that I think I'm justified in making you a little New Year's gift.

[*Going to his heap of brown-paper parcels.*]

Dolly. A New Year's gift! How kind of you! To me?

Pilcher. [*Opening his parcel.*] To you and your husband. To your husband in particular, because, although he may have fallen a little short of perfection during the last year—like some of the rest of us—yet I feel sure that during this coming year—[*They have all been watching him curiously; he has now opened the parcel and displays a very bright brand-new collecting box, with Crookbury Blanket Club painted on it, in large letters. It is much larger than the hospital box.*] My household regulator! [*Giving it to DOLLY.*]

Dolly. [*Who has shown considerable disappointment on the opening of the parcel.*] Crookbury Blanket Club! Thank you so much, for Harry's sake. Harry! For you, dear.

[*She gives the box to HARRY, who places it on the same table.*]

Pilcher. Well, I must be getting on. [*Shaking hands.*] Good-bye, Professor.

Prof. I should like to make that point clear with regard to free will——

Pilcher. When you have an hour, or shall I say a year, to spare, we might argue it out——

Prof. You're going to the White House? If I might accompany you——

Pilcher. Delighted!

[*Shakes hands in dumb show with DOLLY and HARRY.*]

Prof. Renie, you've had your restless fits again. You'd better come with us——

Renie. But I've already been walking——

Prof. My dear, this bracing country air is just what you need. Keep out in it all the day long——

Renie. Oh, very well—the White House, and the fish-pond as usual, I suppose?

Prof. As usual. Come along.

[*Exit. RENIE slightly shrugs her shoulders, very slightly glances at LUCAS and exit after PROFESSOR.*]

Lucas. The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

Matt. Good idea! The dear old fish-pond! We might all take a stroll there!

[*Linking his arm with LUCAS.*]

Lucas. [*Suspicious, holding back.*] I don't know that I care—we went there last year——

Matt. We did! Same old game, eh? Come along.

[*Drags LUCAS off.*]

Pilcher. [*Has been gathering up his parcels.*] Well, good-bye! Good-bye! [*Rattles the hospital box vigorously.*] Three splendid victories for free will and moral resolution!

[*Exit, rattling the box.*]

Harry. Doll, you really haven't got any bills this year?

Dolly. No! no! Only the few little oddments that no woman can prevent.

Harry. You might let me see the little oddments——

Dolly. I will. [*Suddenly.*] Oh Harry, I quite forgot! Do forgive me!

Harry. What?

Dolly. I never wrote the geyser bath people!

Harry. Never mind the geyser bath.

Dolly. And only this morning you rowed me because I hadn't got it ready for the New Year! Where did you put their address?

Harry. I don't know! Somewhere upstairs among my papers.

Dolly. [*Gently pushing him off.*] I can just catch to-night's post! Make haste and get it! Quick! There's a dear! And then we can get the bath fixed up for you next week.

Harry. Ye—es. I say, Doll, I mean to get those oddments fixed up to-night.

[*Taps the writing-case significantly and exit.*

DOLLY looks frightened, sees him off, goes up to writing-desk, takes out bills, looks at them, throws up her arms in despair, groans, slams down the writing-desk, looks at the chair she has touched in first act, shows great resolution, marches up and touches it.

Dolly. Yes! Yes! I have got free will.

[*Goes back from it, again looks at it, again marches up to it, touches it.*

Dolly. Then why do I keep on having bills?

RENIE enters in great agitation and distress.

Renie. Oh, Dolly!

Dolly. What's the matter?

Renie. Oh, Dolly!

Dolly. What is it?

Renie. [*Throws her arms round DOLLY affectionately.*] You've always been such a true friend to me——

Dolly. Yes, dear.

Renie. More like a sister. And I know I may trust you now.

Dolly. [*A little suspicious.*] Yes. Has anything happened?

Renie. Yes. Oh, Dolly——

Dolly. Tell me!

Renie. As we were going out at the garden gate, Captain Wentworth held out a letter behind his back for me to take——

Dolly. What?!

Renie. But now his arm is wounded he couldn't manage it properly, and he dropped it. I hurried to pick it up, and then my husband noticed and insisted on reading it——

Dolly. What was in the letter?

Renie. It wasn't so very bad, but my husband has chosen to jump to a wrong conclusion, and——oh, Dolly, you can help me!

Dolly. [*Coldly, relaxing her embrace.*] How?

Renie. If you'd only let me tell my husband that I was receiving it for you——

Dolly. What?!

Renie. There was no address, and fortunately it proved that you weren't really guilty.

Dolly. Oh! I wasn't really guilty?

Renie. In fact, it proves your complete innocence.

Dolly. I'm glad of that.

Renie. Then you'll let me say it was you?

Dolly. No! You can't suppose I should let my own cousin make love to me in my own house?!

Renie. You won't help me?

Dolly. Yes, any way but that! How could you be so foolish?

Renie. I don't know. When I heard yesterday he was coming, I quite made up my mind I'd have nothing to say to him! Dolly, free will must be an illusion, or else why do I always——oh, what shall I do?

Dolly. As you are completely innocent, you'd better ask your husband to forgive you.

Renie. Ye—es. No! As it is a perfectly pure and exalted attachment I shall take that ground—at any rate at first, and see what he says. You'll help me all you can?

Dolly. Yes, but promise me you'll have nothing to do with Lucas in future!

Renie. No, indeed! if I once get out of this.

Dolly. Very well! I'll see what I can do.—Hush!

The PROFESSOR enters with a letter in his hand, MATT soothing him.

Prof. [*Very angry.*] Not a word more, if you please. Mrs. Telfer, you have doubtless heard——

Dolly. Yes——?

Prof. I leave for London to-night to consult my lawyer. Mrs. Sturgess will, I trust, return to her friends until——

Matt. Perhaps Mrs. Sturgess may be able to explain——

Prof. What explanation can be offered of language like this. [*Reading from letter.*] “From the first moment I saw you, I felt that you were entirely different from any woman I have ever met——” A monstrously inexact statement to start with. And a woman who is capable of practising such deceit——

[*RENIE bursts into tears.*]

Matt. I think you ought to hear what Mrs. Sturgess has to say——

Renie. [*Through her tears.*] What would be the use? With such a nature as his he could never begin to understand the loyal and exalted devotion which Captain Wentworth feels for me! No, all my life I have been misunderstood, misjudged, condemned! Let it be so till the end! Dolly, come and help me pack!

[*Exit.* MATT goes up to table and takes up proofs of PROFESSOR'S book and looks through them.

Dolly. You're really too severe with poor Renie——

Prof. I am not severe. I simply register the inevitable sentence of the husband upon the wife who misconducts herself!

Dolly. Misconducts herself! She has merely had a little harmless flirtation——

Prof. In my wife a flirtation of this character [*pointing to letter in his hand*] constitutes grave misconduct.

Dolly. But that's perfectly ridiculous! Why it might happen to any woman! Dad, explain to him——

Matt. Professor, you're taking altogether a wrong view of this. Now this case you were pointing out to me in your own book [*pointing to proofs*]*—*Number forty-nine, Mrs. Copway. Remarkably handsome woman too!—[*reading*] “The injustice and cruelty of condemning this poor lady must be apparent to all.” My dear Professor, before publishing this book you'll have to modify your theory.

Prof. I cannot modify my theory. I have spent ten years in collecting facts which prove it.

Matt. Then, pardon me, you must really look over Mrs. Sturgess's little indiscretion.

Prof. That is equally impossible——

Matt. But you say that her action in receiving my nephew's letter was entirely due to the activity of certain atoms in the gray matter of her brain.

Prof. Undoubtedly that is so.

Dolly. Very well then, if her gray matter keeps on working wrong, what's the use of blaming her? You say yourself there's no such thing as free will——

Prof. Precisely, but I have always allowed that in the present low moral and intellectual condition of the herd of mankind, free will is a plausible working hypothesis.

Dolly. But it doesn't work! Free will won't work at all! Look at my own case! Do you suppose I should go on all my life having bills if I could help myself? [*Catching MATT'S eye, who looks at her gravely and*

holds up his finger.] Never mind my bills! Do make him see how wrong and absurd it is to punish poor Renie when there's no such thing as free will!

Matt. Dolly's right! She's only saying what you have so admirably laid down here. My dear Professor, you cannot possibly publish this book!

Prof. But it has been announced! I must publish it.

Matt. You cannot. Read that. [*Giving the PROFESSOR the book and pointing out passage.*] Surely after that you cannot condemn Mrs. Sturgess.

Prof. [*Taking book, glancing at the passage.*] Really, it's most annoying when one's own wife upsets——

Matt. Oh! they're always making hay of our theories one way or the other.

Prof. Of course, if one presses the matter home to first principles——

Dolly. Yes! Yes! Well, why not act on your own first principles! You ought to be very sorry for poor Renie, considering all she has suffered.

Prof. Suffered?

Dolly. Yes, poor dear! You don't know what an awful struggle she has gone through between this unfortunate flirtation and her admiration for you.

Prof. Her admiration for me!

Dolly. Yes! She always speaks of you as her great protagonist of science.

Prof. [*Mollified.*] Does she? Does she?

Dolly. Yes. If I were you I should go upstairs, and be very sweet to her, and above all don't reproach her. We women can endure anything except reproaches——

Prof. [*Looking at his proofs.*] I must publish my book. And after all, as you say, it is useless to blame them when——a——

Matt. When, bless them, they can't help themselves.

Prof. I will hear what she has to say——

Dolly. No! Go straight to her, and forgive her, and don't say another word. And then I'm sure her gray

matter will soon be all right. And what a triumph that will be for you!

Prof. It does offer a way out of the difficulty.

[*Exit.*

Dolly. Dad, I won't have her here next Christmas.

Matt. No, my dear, I wouldn't.

Dolly. That wretched Lucas!

Matt. What is to be done with him?

Dolly. Pack him off! Pack him off at once!

[*LUCAS cautiously looks in from upper conservatory door.*

Lucas. I say, how 's the old bird seem to take it?

Dolly. Old bird!

Lucas. He isn't going to make a shindy over a trifle like this?

Dolly. Trifle! He's threatening to divorce her and expose you!

Lucas. You don't say so. I'm awfully sorry!

Dolly. Sorry!

Lucas. I am, indeed! And any reparation I can make——

Dolly. Reparation?!

Lucas. Such as an apology——

[*DOLLY utters a contemptuous exclamation.*

Matt. Will you give me your word of honour never to see Mrs. Sturgess again?

Lucas. Yes.

Matt. Or write to her?

Lucas. Yes.

Matt. The word of honour of an English gentleman used to mean something, Lu.

Lucas. It does now, Uncle Matt!

Matt. [*Shakes hands with him heartily.*] Then I'll take it. Now be off as quickly as you can and let us make the best of it for you and her.

Lucas. Thanks. Good-bye!

Matt. Good-bye!

[*LUCAS crosses to DOLLY, offers his hand.*

Dolly. No, Lu. If Renie gets out of this safely and if you behave yourself, I'll shake hands with you when you come back from India.

Lucas. You're taking this too seriously—you're taking it far too seriously! [Exit.]

Matt. We're making a splendid start again for the New Year!

Dolly. I hope this will be a lesson for Renie!

Matt. I hope so. How about yourself?

Dolly. What do you mean?

Matt. I put the sovereign in, but—you've got a few more bills, eh?

Dolly. Just a few oddments.

Matt. How much?

Dolly. I don't know. Dad——

Matt. Well?

Dolly. Now that South Africans have gone up at last, and you won that splendid coup on them last week——

Matt. Well?

Dolly. You couldn't lend me—a few hundreds—till my allowance comes due? Just a few hundreds——

Matt. [In a low reproachful tone, shaking his head.] What? What? What? Sad! Sad! Sad!!

Dolly. [Listens.] There's Harry! You will help me, Dad—you will?

Matt. I'll see what I can do.

HARRY enters cheerfully.

Harry. That's all right, Doll! There's the address.
[Giving a slip of paper.]

Dolly. Thanks, dear.

Harry. And now about these mere oddments?

Dolly. Not now, dear.

Harry. Yes, dear, now. [Very sternly.] This instant!

Dolly. Harry, you're going to lose your temper——

Harry. No. I'm going to keep a firm guard on it, but [very sternly] let me see those bills.

Dolly. [*Creeps frightened up to the desk.*] I'm sure you're going to lose your temper.

[*Opens the desk.*]

Harry. [*Firmly.*] No. I'm quite calm. Whose bill is that? [*She hands him one timorously.*] Fulks and Garner! Artist Furriers! More artists! [*looks at total*]—one hundred and twenty-four pounds. Well, I'm——

Dolly. Ah, Jobling!

Harry. I should think I am Jobling. And you said you'd never enter their shop again!

Dolly. I never meant to, but this time it was absolutely necessary——

Harry. Necessary?

Dolly. Yes—you see the chief item——

Harry. [*Reads.*] Chinchilla toque, coat, muff and boa—eighty guineas—eighty guineas——

Dolly. I got them as a surprise for you when we go South next week.

Harry. Surprise! Great heavens! What in the name of all——

Matt. Shush, Harry! Her motive was a good one. She got it to please you!

Dolly. You haven't seen it yet, it's just outside—I've a great mind to give you a great New Year's treat and let you see it on!

Harry. I'm not going to be sweedled——

Matt. Hush! Harry! Let her put it on! Let's have a look at it, and see whether it's worth the money. Put it on, Doll. [*Exit DOLLY.*]

Harry. [*Calls after her.*] I tell you I'm not going to be sweedled!——

Matt. What is sweedled?

Harry. Sweedling is sweedling! It's part swindling and part wheedling! It's what every d—ee—d good-natured husband like me has to go through, when he's fool enough to put up with it!

Matt. Well, old boy, you'll have to pay, you know; it will come to that in the end.

Harry. I'm not going to be sweedled——

Matt. And if Dolly has been a little extravagant, I must help her out with it to-morrow morning!

Harry. No, we'll go into it thoroughly to-night.

Matt. No, Harry, we won't. My room is just above here. Besides, the cook is going to give us a special New Year dinner, and I want to enjoy it. This New Year we'll start with a comfortable evening, please!

DOLLY enters at back in a very handsome Chinchilla coat. HARRY looks a little sulky. She stands in the middle of the room and displays it.

Dolly. Well? [*He looks at it rather sulkily, walks away; she follows him.*] Well? [*Walking after him.*] Well? Well?

[He turns, looks at her, she stands and holds out her arms.

Harry. Oh, hang it all! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her.*] There!

Dolly. [*Kissing him heartily.*] And there! [*Another kiss.*] And there! [*Another kiss.*] And there! [*Catches sight of the collecting box, goes to it, furiously sweeps it off its table on to the floor.*] AND THERE!

CURTAIN.

APP 23 1910

at

DOLLY REFORMING HERSELF

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

“Memnon conçut un jour le projet insensé d’être parfaitement sage. Il n’y a guère d’hommes à qui cette folie n’ait quelquefois passé par la tête.”—VOLTAIRE.

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